

THE
WORKS

Of the late

Reverend and Learned

Mr. *Joseph Stennett.*

V O L. III.

Containing TWELVE SERMONS,
never before published,

WITH

AN ALPHABETICAL INDEX of Matters.



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S E R M O N I.

The unreasonableness and danger of following a multitude to do evil considered.

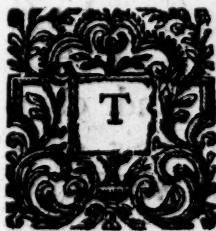
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EXOD. xxiii. 2.

The former part of the verse.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.

The first S E R M O N on this text.



THE light of nature teaches men to seek society one with another, and to be impatient in a state of solitude: and in order to enjoy the advantages of community, they naturally desire to be formed into order, that they may have the benefit of some kind of government

vernment and regularity among themselves. But tho these are great advantages when duly improved, they are very prejudicial when they are abused. There is no desire more natural and necessary to men than that of being happy ; and yet none is more abused than this, because most men seek happiness in the pleasures of sin : but that is not where it ought to be expected, or where it ever will be effectually found. And so in seeking the benefits and advantages of society, of order, and government, the corrupt nature of men engages them to pursue things in such a manner as that they augment their guilt, and likewise their misery, instead of alleviating it : for while they avoid solitude, and delight themselves in society, they are ready to *follow the multitude to do evil* ; and while they seek the advantage of order, and government, instead of regular submission to their superiors, they often yield themselves up to be governed by them after such a manner as is inconsistent with their allegiance to the supreme Being. They devote their consciences to them ; in which sort they ought not to be the *servants of men*^a. They make them lords of their faith, and of their consciences, and obey them in such instances wherein their obedience to men is inconsistent with what they owe to God.

^a 1 Cor. 7. 23.

In opposition to this great evil, the words of our text, and those which follow in the same verse, are fixed as standing rules. *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*: we are not to be so complaisant to mankind as to follow great numbers in any thing that is evil. *Neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment*: we ought not to have such complaisance for evil governors, or for false witnesses, as to join with them in perverting and wresting of judgment. This latter word *many*, is the same in the original ^b with the former. But some interpret both to signify great persons in quality, as well as a great number of people. Some interpret the former part to relate precisely to a *multitude* of people; but think that the latter word translated *many*, signifies the mighty, or governors: *Thou shalt not speak in a cause to incline after the mighty, or governors, to wrest judgment*. Perhaps these words may be accommodated to both, strictly speaking: and then two of the greatest prejudices, and the most pernicious in the world, are forbidden thereby. We are not to incline either after *the multitude*; or after *the mighty*, after those who have power, who are persons of authority, of quality and rank, to do any thing that is evil. There is nothing more common in the world than the transgression of this precept: therefore I think hardly any thing to be

more useful than to establish the truth and the reasonableness of it ; I mean, of the precept, in opposition to the vice that is so common, and of which few men are intirely freed.

These words were given by God to Moses, when he was revealing his mind to the Jews : and they are a part of that law, which, if well-observed by them, would have made them appear to be a wise people in the eyes of all nations in the world, as well as have promoted holiness and religion amongst them in such a manner as to have secured to them the divine favour. After the giving the decalogue, or ten commandments upon mount Sinai, with an audible voice from heaven, which distinguished it from all other laws ; God was pleased to give a body of laws, which were partly an inculcation of the ten precepts, and partly an explication of them ; partly ceremonial, which God thought fit then to establish ; and partly what were called judicial, strictly relating to the Jewish polity, and suited to the circumstances they were to be in in the land of Canaan. These last cannot be accommodated to people under other circumstances ; as, the way appointed for mortgaging and releasing of estates, the way of setting their servants at liberty, or continuing them in their service ; and divers things of this kind, which could suit no nation in the world but themselves.

The words of our text are a part of a moral law. They are a rule given, which may direct not only in matters of judgment, and of the conduct of civil life ; but in especial manner in matters of religion and conscience. And it is evident, that the principal design of forbidding us *to follow a multitude to do evil*, is, not merely to signify that it is imprudent to follow a multitude to engage in vulgar errors, to bring any disadvantage upon ourselves ; but to let us know that it is criminal to follow a multitude to commit a moral evil, to do any thing which is sinful. Every one who hath the exercise of reason, must needs grant that this rule is a moral one ; that it is founded upon the moral law : for, *sin is the transgression of the law* ^c ; and this forbids us to commit sin upon any account whatsoever, let the pretence be ever so specious ; suffers us not to imagine that it will be any excuse to us that a multitude of people do the same thing, or that rulers and governors do the same thing, or require us to do it. The law of God is against this : for sin, which is absolutely sinful, that is evil in itself ; and all the numbers, or power in the world, can never make it innocent, or make it change its nature, so as that we should not become criminal if we commit it.

^c 1 John 3. 4.

This is a rule that is constant and standing in all times and seasons. No-body can be so absurd as to imagine, that it is less criminal to *follow a multitude to do evil* now, than it was when these precepts were first delivered by the hand of Moses to the people of Israel. The difference betwixt virtue and vice, good and evil, is still the same. Therefore this is a perpetual rule, and ought to guide and govern us in all seasons and generations of the world; and will be a standing precept for ever, as being founded upon the just consideration of the nature of God, and the necessary difference betwixt good and evil.

So much therefore may suffice as to the nature of this precept, and the obligation of it. That which I promise myself to do upon this text, is,

- I. To explain it more particularly.
- II. To shew the necessity of such a precept; the great need that this people, and indeed all the world, have of it.
- III. To shew the justice and reasonableness of it. And then,
- IV. To make some improvement.

I. Having given you the general scope of the precept, I would explain it to you a little more particularly. And we may take notice both of the form and matter of it.

I. Of the form of it. And here we may observe,

(1.) That it is a negative precept. And such are most of the precepts of the decalogue. God forbids such and such sins; and this is to raise a becoming horror in our minds at the thoughts of evil. This is a very instructive and pathetic manner of enjoining precepts. It is a fainter and colder way of giving laws to say, thou shalt preserve the life of thy neighbour, or thou shalt do justice to thy neighbour; tho this comprehends that we are not to kill or to steal. But *thou shalt not kill*, or, *thou shalt not steal*; this is striking immediately upon the thing, and pointing at it, so as no man can excuse himself, or say he does not understand the meaning or extent of such a precept. So here, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*. Indeed the substance of this we have in divers positive laws of God. As, when the Lord commands us to own him to be our God, and to worship him: the having him wholly for our God, comprehends in it that we should pay him so great a respect as never to make others lords of our consciences, or bring others in competition with him. To *follow a multitude*, or follow great men *to do evil*; this would be to transgress the law, which forbids us to have any other gods besides him. But now tho that be comprehended in it, yet this comes more directly to the particular case. That law which

commands us to worship God, shews that we are not to pay such adoration and reverence to men as *to follow them to do evil*, which is to act contrary to God to please them: but our text is a more express and particular declaration of the divine will in this respect. 'Tis a good general rule, that those laws which prescribe duties to us, forbid the contrary sins; and those laws which forbid evil, prescribe the contrary duties. So here, when we are bid *not to follow a multitude to do evil*, we are to conceive that this doth comprehend in it that we are to perform all those duties which are contrary to the sin here prohibited; that we are to love God, to adore, and glorify him, to be governed by him, by truth and reason, against all authority, against all numbers whatsoever. So that you see this law is very comprehensive, if we will take it in its due latitude: and God discovers his will in it in a very express manner.

(2.) Another thing to be observed in the form of this precept is, that it is given directly to every single person; not only in general to men, you shall not do so, but *thou shalt not*. No man may excuse himself, and think either that he is too great, as being a magistrate; or too little, or despicable, as being of no account and consequence in the world in comparison of others, and so is not reach'd by this law. 'Tis so expressed, lest any man should say, "I am
" so

“ so ignorant, and have so few means of
“ knowledge and instruction, that I must
“ follow a multitude ; I have no other rule
“ to go by : lest any should say, I have not
“ the opportunities and advantages for the
“ direction of my conscience as others have,
“ therefore I think it safest to follow my
“ leaders and governors, and to be directed
“ by them in this matter ; and I hope God
“ will not be extreme to mark my iniquities,
“ because I am under so many disadvantages,
“ and can’t examine and look into things so
“ strictly as others.” All these kinds of ex-
cuses are prevented by the terms of the law,
Thou shalt not. As the prophet speaks to
David, when he lays his sin before him, *Thou
art the man*^d ; so when God sets this pre-
cept before us, I may say to every one of
you, thou art the person to whom God
speaks : neither thou, nor thou, nor any of
you, may transgress this law upon any pre-
tence whatsoever ; none of you may *follow
a multitude to do evil.*

2. We are to consider the matter of the
precept. And here I must explain to you
what is signified by *doing of evil* ; what by
the multitude ; and what by *following a mul-
titude.*

(1.) What is signified by *doing of evil.*
You know that there are two sorts of evils,
the evil of sin, and the evil of punishment ;

one is called moral, and the other penal evil. It is evident that it is moral evil which is spoken against in our text. It may be lawful to follow a multitude of rulers, or governors, in inflicting punishments when they are just. So that there is no pretence in the world that this can signify any other than moral evil. The word in the original ^c is *in evil*, or *evils* : and so the Septuagint ^f render it, *Thou shalt not be after many in evil*, or *in wickedness* : *in evil* ; that is, in sin, in doing of evil, in doing that which is contrary to the divine rule which God hath prescribed.

Now the sense of it, according to this explication, must be to this purpose : *Thou shalt not follow a multitude* to commit any sin ; whether this sin be what they call a sin of commission, or of omission ; whether it be to do that which God forbids, or to omit doing that which God commands. *Sin is the transgression of the law* ^g. This is a good definition of it which the apostle hath given us. And this regards not only our external behaviour, but the internal government of ourselves. We are not to follow a multitude in our belief, in our notions, in the doctrines or principles which we embrace, if they are evil, if they are erroneous, if they are wrong ; any more than we are to follow a multitude in doing a criminal action which is openly done by them.

^c תַּרְחֵל^f Οὐκ ἔσθ' μετὰ πλειόνων

ἐπὶ κακίᾳ.

^g 1 John 3. 4.

This, moreover, hath regard to every part of our duty in respect of the several objects to which it more immediately refers. Some sins are more directly committed against God ; some against ourselves ; and some against our neighbour. We are not to follow a multitude in any thing that is contrary to piety, in the service and respect which we owe to God. We are not to follow a multitude in any thing that is contrary to temperance, sobriety, and chastity, in opposition to the laws of God, which are given for the government of ourselves. We are not to follow a multitude in any thing that is contrary to justice and charity : we are not to follow them in opposition to any of those duties which God hath prescribed for the conduct of ourselves aright towards our fellow-creatures, whether they are our equals, superiors, or inferiors. In a word, in any thing that is evil ; in any thing that is sinful, we are not to follow a multitude. That is the sense of the text with respect to the *evil* there spoken of.

(2.) As for *the multitude*, you see it is indefinitely delivered ; there is no certain number of men represented to us whom we may, or may not follow. But let the multitude be lesser or greater, let it be a community of what number soever ; we are not to follow the greater part in doing any thing that is a sin. Let it be mankind in general ; you are not to follow the greatest numbers of

of nations, the most numerous societies of men, to do any thing that is evil. And, as I intimated to you before, that some interpret it of the mighty, the men of quality, rulers, judges, or princes, who have a multiplied power and authority; we are not to follow these in doing of evil. Indeed there is much the same reason for the one as for the other: and I may have occasion to touch upon this as well as that, in the treating of this matter; tho my principal design is to discourse of the text according to the sense given by our translators, that being the most simple, and therefore seeming to be the most genuine exposition. If you ask,

(3.) What it is to *follow a multitude*? It is in the original, ^h *Thou shalt not be after a multitude*; and the Septuagint ⁱ render it, *Thou shalt not be with the multitude*: but the sense is much the same. We are not to follow them, to attend or wait upon them, as servants do upon their masters; for this is a posture of special respect and reverence. We are not to wait upon them as the psalmist says he would wait upon God: *As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God* ^k. We are not to pay them such respect and deference as to wait upon them,

^h אחר־ידבִּים
ⁱ μετὰ πλεόνων.

| ^k Psal. 123. 1.

to serve them in any of their designs, when they are contrary to truth and holiness, when they are evil. To *follow them*, or to go after them, may signify our accompanying of them in any thing that is criminal. We are not to hearken to the voice of sinners, as the wise man represents thieves and murderers tempting others: *Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive, as the grave, and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse.* To which he subjoins his religious counsel: *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Walk not thou in the way with them: refrain thy foot from their path*¹. We are not to accompany a great multitude in doing any thing that is evil. Moreover, *following* may signify imitation of them. We are not to take them for our pattern, but avoid them and their evil practices with the greatest care and diligence. In short, we are not to serve any one in bringing about any evil matter, in transgressing any law of God. We are not to be the servants or companions of any in the perpetration of sin, or take them for our pattern who walk contrary to the law of God.

So that the sum of the matter is this: we are every one of us forbidden by this pre-

¹ Prov. I. 10—15.

cept to follow ever so great a multitude, or to accompany them or serve them in doing any thing that is contrary to the law of God: I say, in any instance whatsoever we are not to break any one law of God, in complaisance even to the greatest multitude of men.

Having thus explain'd the words, I proceed,

II. To discourse of the great necessity of this law; how needful it was that God should give such a precept as this, and that he should give it in so express a manner. The laws of men are calculated according to their present exigences, and they seldom see far before them: therefore it hath been often observed, amongst the wisest nations, that some cases have started up, against which their laws did not provide; they did not imagine that such and such crimes would have been committed, and therefore there were no laws formed against such as should perpetrate them. But God's law is perfect: he knows all the springs and motions of our souls, and therefore hath provided against all the sins which the children of men are capable of committing: and we shall evidently see, if we will observe human nature, how great need there is of this law.

1. By reason of the extensiveness of the vice which it prohibits. For is there any thing in the world more commonly committed, and in which people more easily satisfy

satisfy themselves, than that sin against which this law is directed? Is any thing more common in the world than for men to govern themselves by the multitude in their actions, and in their customs, and in their thoughts and opinions, both in matters of reason and trade, and in matters of religion too? Abundance of people are of certain common opinions, in ordinary and indifferent things, which have no relation to vice or virtue, merely because they have heard so and so. It is the opinion that hath been constantly retained: they believe things which they see other people generally believe: and if you would ask them any farther reason, as, suppose you would philosophize about the frame of things, or the nature of this world; and ask them, why they entertain such a received opinion about these things, they can render no other reason than that they have heard so, and then find that other people generally believe it. Thus they do in things relating to human life; thus they dispose of their trade and business: the government of their families, the œconomy of their houses is managed such and such a way; not because this is better than any other way, but the chief reason is, because others have done so before them, and they would never give themselves the trouble to examine whether things could be managed after a better manner or not. How many nations are there,
which

which have very foolish and troublesome customs, which they retain, and would be very jealous if any should go to change and alter them ; and yet they have no reason in the world to keep them, but only because they have been accustomed to them ; they have been used to such and such ways in the management of their land, their families, and the dressing of their food. Even in such ordinary things as these, they will by no means in the world change from a bad custom to a good. Tho their senses tell them another is a better custom, yet they will by no means alter, because it has been the usage of their ancestors, and is the custom of their nation. So foolish is the generality of mankind ! And this were the less to be minded, if it were only in such common and ordinary things : but when it comes to the matter of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice ; for men then to govern themselves by custom, by the common opinions, without any manner of examination ; this is a lamentation, and ought to be for a lamentation. It is the great source and spring of much vice, a prejudice deeply rooted in the minds of men, and hard to be extirpated out of them. And should this unaccountable conduct be only found amongst the more ignorant sort of people, and those who appear less concerned for religion ; there would not be so great need for the lamentation as really there is. But how many argue after
such

such a manner in their minds, nay, have not scrupled to do it with their lips too, who yet have been under the strict profession of religion? How often have they thought that they have sufficiently answered some doctrines and truths which have been confirmed to them by good reasons and proofs, by saying there are a great many good men on the side of that opinion they hold, when, on the other side, there are but a-few; and that certainly if this had been a truth, a great many would have known and profess'd it? As if truth was always on the side of the multitude, and as if they were safe when they had numbers on their side; or as if God had not, in the most express terms, discovered his dislike of such a way of reasoning, by giving such a law as is recorded in our text, that they *should not follow a multitude to do evil.* I do not doubt but every one of you, upon reflection, will find that this is the common way of mens reasoning, and their actions are guided after this manner. For how few can give any other reason why they do such and such things, but because they find others do so. Not only do they take their innocent customs from others, but even those which are criminal; and they will do thus because the multitude do it. Indeed it would be a vain affectation of singularity for people to distinguish themselves from others by their habit or speech. We should accommodate ourselves to mankind

as far as innocently we may, that we may not appear wild and barbarous to them. But we are not to imitate them in their excesses, in their follies, in their vices : we are not to comply with the multitude in these things, tho we may in those which are innocent ; that we may have the fairer opportunity to do service to their souls, and make the light of our holy religion shine by our conversations among them.

But let us a little inquire into times past, as well as what we have observed in our own time ; and we shall find that not only in this, but in other ages of the world, the same vain prejudice hath prevailed and governed the minds of the generality of people, to *follow a multitude to do evil*. After sin entred into the world, it was not much to be wondred at that there were few people reformed ; and that God never had so great a number of people in the world as the devil had in his kingdom. *The whole world lies in wickedness* ^m, says the apostle ; in the primitive times, when there were great conversions wrought. And what is it that hath all along confirmed the wicked in their prejudices ? They would *follow the multitude* ; they would follow the greatest numbers. If any question arose concerning truth, it must be determined by the numbers which have been found on the one

^m 1 John 5. 19.

side, or on the other : and where the greatest numbers have been found, there the persons examining have imagin'd that truth was to be found. It is true, there is something in the minds of men ; some light, some knowledge, which hath oftentimes convinc'd them that the multitude was in the wrong in such and such instances. But even then they have suffered themselves to be drawn along by the multitude, and carried away with the tide ; suffered themselves to be led into destruction, because they have imagined there was at least some sort of safety in following the multitude.

How numerous were the persons of the old world who were vicious, and how few who were righteous ? Very few men were remarkable as Abel ; and as Enoch, who *walked with God*ⁿ. But *all flesh had corrupted his way upon earth*^o. This was the complaint from heaven of the miserable degeneracy and corruption of mankind. Noah might preach 120 years, yet but few people would hearken to him. They thought it was best and safest to *follow the multitude*, tho it were in the commission of evil. Who would follow Abram when he *left his country, and his father's house*^p ? There is no great doubt but Abram was zealous for the truth he had embraced, and would willingly have carried some of his family, some of his

ⁿ Gen. 5. 22.^o Chap. 6. 12.^p Gen. 12. 1.

country along with him : but what determined them ? Abram's arguments would not prevail upon them to follow him ; but the multitude, the customs of their fathers, their ancestors, their traditions, and their great company, these determined their thoughts.

When God was pleased by so many judgments, by such appearances of power and glory, and by his constant miraculous presence in the temple to establish his worship among the Jews ; all the nations round about trembled and feared when they heard of these mighty things : they could not but be convinced that this was the great and true God ; at least great numbers of them. Curiosity could bring the queen of Sheba from the remotest parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon : but how few among the heathens would come to the worship of God among the Jews ? Here and there one devout and pious soul, who would not be led by tradition and custom, but would examine and search into the truth of things, resolved to seek for the true God and his worship, how far soever he was carried, and to whatsoever inconveniences he might be exposed in seeking after him : there were some therefore who joined themselves unto the Lord and his worship. And what determined these men ? They would *not follow the multitude to do evil*. But for the generality, it was impossible to persuade them. They would not forsake their idols, their vanities :

not

not all the miracles which were wrought could get them off from *following the multitude to do evil*. They could argue after this manner: these Jews live upon a very little part of the world; they profess to be against idolatry, and to worship the true God; and there are great and wonderful works wrought to confirm that religion which they profess: but can these few people, who live upon such a little spot of ground, be wiser than all the world? Do we not see all nations worshiping the sun, moon, and stars? Have not all nations these gods? and shall we believe these few people in opposition to this multitude? Shall we follow them in their laws against all the nations in the world? A very popular argument! and must needs have determined the thoughts of abundance of people to whom the knowledge of these things came. And when the force of conviction came strong on the minds of others, they were unwilling to enter upon a new profession of religion alone: and since their families, and relations, and neighbours, could not be engaged to become Jews too, they chose to keep with the largest company; and would *follow the idolatrous multitude*, tho it were *to do so much evil*.

When the people of Israel themselves were corrupted by idolatry, when they entertained the gods of the nations amongst them; how do you imagine that they were drawn off so

generally from the worship of the true God, notwithstanding all the light they had, and all the wonders their fathers had told them of? Why, truly they would be like other nations; they would not be singular: they found other nations worshiped images, and set up altars under every spreading tree; and therefore they would be like them: they would *follow the multitude to do evil*. When the ten tribes were conscious to themselves it was a great evil to set up idols, and to worship them; when Jerusalem was known to be the place appointed for worship, and yet in opposition hereto Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, and ordered that the feast should be changed to another time than God had prescribed; some few of the Israelites would go to Jerusalem to worship^a. But how do you think they were laughed at by the rest? how were they persecuted; and what arguments can you imagine were used with them? “Will you be wiser than the rest? Do you think that Judah and Benjamin are in the right; that these two tribes are in the right, when here are ten tribes of another mind?” Constant observation teaches us how prevalent this way of arguing is amongst the people. When the two tribes were corrupted in like manner by idolatry, no doubt but this principle had a great hand in leading them to it, and after-

^a 1 Kings 12. 27—33.

wards confirming them therein. " Shall we
" be wiser than our brethren, the ten tribes ?
" Why should we not have such groves, and
" such ceremonies and worship as they, and
" all the nations round about us ? Is it not
" better to follow the multitude ?" When
eminent prophets came amongst them, and
told them of their sins, and endeavoured to
reform the people ; yet they would be as the
nations round about them : they hated to be
reform'd. *As for the word of the Lord, say*
they, we will not do it. And why ? Because
they would be like the heathens, their
neighbours, who were round about them.
When a few adhered to the prophets, to any
prophet whom God raised up amongst them ;
how do you imagine they were despised by
the rest, that they would be so singular, and
set up for the knowledge of the truth, in
opposition to the principles and practices of
the multitude ? So that this *following the*
multitude to do evil, in both respects, whe-
ther great numbers, or rulers and great men,
they generally go together.

Was it not thus when our Saviour ap-
peared upon earth ? When such mighty mi-
racles were wrought by him, and such an
evidence and authority attended his preach-
ing, one would wonder that the people
should oppose such light as this. But what
was the argument ? *Have any of the rulers,*
or of the Pharisees, believed on him ? " Here

† John 7. 48.

“ is one pretends to be the Meffias ; he is
 “ neither a great man himself, nor hath he
 “ a great number of disciples who have em-
 “ braced his doctrine, and wait upon him
 “ at his appearing. There are a few indeed
 “ who follow him ; but what are these in
 “ comparifon to all the people of this na-
 “ tion ?” A very popular pretence to keep
 the people from embracing the truth ! When
 the apostles preached, after the ascension of
 our blessed Saviour ; what was to be expected
 by them, notwithstanding all the miracles
 they wrought, and in the face of the people
 of so many nations ? Tho the gospel they
 heard, was preached by illiterate men in such
 various languages so miraculously ; did the
 generality embrace it ? No : there were
 some believed the gospel ; but so few, that
 the prophet foreseeing it, cries out, *Who*
hath believed our report ? and to whom is the
arm of the Lord revealed ¹ ? The generality
 would follow the multitude to do evil. Many
 people were touched when they saw Christ’s
 miracles : but when it comes to a popular
 vote, whether he should be put to death, or
 saved alive ; what was the voice of the mul-
 titude but *crucify him, crucify him* ² ? They
 would follow the great men, and the greatest
 numbers : and since there were but few who
 adhered to our Lord Jesus Christ ; therefore
 they would not be on his side.

¹ Isa. 53. 1.

| ² Luke 23. 21.

And the apostles, how were they despised when they travelled to spread the gospel? Some few indeed were converted; but what were these in comparison of those who remained in infidelity? They saw the miracles of the apostles; they heard them preach; they were surprized and amazed. But when they came to determine, shall we hearken to these truths? shall we believe the doctrine of a crucified Jesus, and the doctrine of his resurrection? shall we forsake our vices, and walk after the pattern of Christ? “No: we will not be determined by these few men. Can it be imagined that all the rest of mankind are in an error; that all the princes and philosophers in the world, and almost all the people too, are in an error? No: we will not believe the doctrine of these few men, who pretend to know more than all the world besides.” How often was this objected to the apostles themselves? How often, I say, objected to them? And how often did men determine to remain in their evil practices, and to retain their evil customs, for no other reason but because they would *follow the multitude*? And as it was in their day, so it hath been ever since. If any reformation has started up in the world in any particular nation, then this has been the language, this has been the vogue of the people; “are you wiser than all mankind besides?” without taking the pains to examine into things. “This has determined them: the

“ the greater number is most likely to be in
“ the right ; and therefore as it is the most
“ safe and evident course we can take, we
“ will *follow the multitude.*”

When light sprang up about 200 years ago, and God raised up some eminent persons to declare his truth ; the constant objection to the reformation they proposed, was the opinion and practice of the multitude of the princes, the rulers, and the learned men of the world. This did not however discourage them in their work : but that was the popular pretence against them : and so it is to this day.

How many of the reformed religion use the same way of reasoning as the Romish church have done before them ? Thus those of the Romish communion say, “ we believe “ as the church believes.” They, upon the imagination that they have the greatest numbers with them, except against the doctrine of the reformation, &c. And amongst the reformed, if any confirm by scripture a truth not commonly received ; too many, when they cannot answer the arguments advanc’d, have this ready at hand ; “ the greatest part “ of the reformation, the greatest part of “ protestants are on our side, we will go “ with the multitude.” And thus, those who do not plead the general multitude of the whole world, they will plead the multitude in a lesser number, party, or community.

But

But after all, is not this plain trifling, and an evident breach of this rule which God has given us, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*? If we cannot prove that what we practise is innocent, and that the doctrines we hold are founded upon the holy scripture, but continue to embrace errors; we shall never justify our conduct by saying, we have great numbers on our side, tho amongst them there be men of great learning, and who have acquired authority by their wisdom, by their power, and by their riches. All these will not do. *Fear not, little flock*, says Christ; *it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* †. Christ's flock is a little flock: while *wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat* ‡. And if we have no better argument for our principles, or profession, than the numbers which are on our side; this is so far from being a good one, that it should itself make us jealous that we are in the wrong.

What hath been advanced already, shews you how great need there was of this law; since there is hardly any prejudice which obtains more upon people's minds, and determines their thoughts, than the opinions and practices of the multitude. But yet I have not done with this head. For I design to

† Luke 12. 32.

‡ Mat. 7. 13.

shew you what are the causes of this prevailing prejudice upon the minds of men, that they are so often determined by the multitude to do evil, tho the law of God is so strict against it. And in shewing the causes, thereby I shall shew you how great and dangerous an evil this is; and how unaccountable and unreasonable. All which will serve to convince you what need there was of such a precept; and that it ought to be constantly remembred by us, and often called to mind, lest we should be corrupted by the same prejudices.





S E R M O N II.

Preach'd at

PINNERS-HALL, December 9, 1704.

EXOD. xxiii. 2.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.—

The second S E R M O N on this text.



IN a former discourse I propos'd to explain the scope of this command of God : to consider also the great necessity of such a precept ; and the justice and reasonableness of it : and, lastly, to make some improvement.

I. In the explication, I took notice of the form in which it is delivered. It is a negative precept, and strikes directly at the vice it prohibits ; points it out after so exact a manner, and with such force, and emphasis, that there can be no pretence or excuse found to salve our consciences, if we do not attend unto the voice of God in it. And tho

tho it contains in it the recommendation of the opposite virtue ; yet in speaking against this vice in this express manner, it cuts off, as other negatives commonly do, many disputes which men may form, and many pretences which they may raise in their minds to palliate the vices they commit. When we are required to *worship the Lord our God alone*, and to *hearken to the voice of his commands* ; these general positive precepts contain in them what is expressed in this negative one : for, if we must hearken to God, if we must worship him, and obey his commandments ; then it is a necessary inference, that we must *not follow a multitude to do evil*. But lest men should make distinctions to get themselves off from such general commands, God hath marked out such and such vices by many negative precepts, that there might be no colour of excuse left.

I also observed to you, that it is spoken in the second person to every individual man ; lest any should pretend that they are under such circumstances that they must *follow a multitude to do evil*. Lest any should say, they have such small means of knowing, and their capacities are so small and slender, that they must be governed by the minds of others ; God speaks to the conscience of every man who hath the use of reason, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*. No person is to excuse himself therefore, as if he were

an exception, when the command is directed to every individual one.

I shewed you, that by *doing evil* is signified committing of sin, whether it be in our own minds by exposing ourselves to delusions, to vain imaginations and errors, not making that use of our understanding which we ought to do; or whether it be in the practice of our lives. We are neither in our actions or words, or in our thoughts, or opinions, to *follow the multitude to do evil*. We are not to entertain any false notions and doctrines; nor are we to act contrary to the divine commands in any respect, in complaisance to any number of men whatsoever. As *sin is the transgression of God's law*, there is no number of men can excuse our commission of it: and therefore we must confine ourselves to walk according to the divine will; and not according to the will of men, however numerous they may be.

Tho *the multitude* may signify a great number of men, whether the greatest number in comparison of any other, or a greater number in comparison with a lesser; we are neither to follow the evil customs of the whole world, nor the particular custom or practice of any nation, any community of men, to do any thing which is evil, whatsoever numbers they may be in comparison with those who differ from them.

I observed to you by the way, that the word is rendred by some *the great*, or *the mighty*

mighty man. I know that may be contained in it indeed : and there is a great truth in this, that it is our duty even to differ from great men, men of quality and power, men who have abundance of authority, in civil matters ; or who have acquired authority over the minds of many by their supposed wisdom. We are not to *follow* any of these *to do evil*. But I especially proposed to consider the words as they are translated, with reference to *a multitude of people*. I have shewn you, that to follow these is to attend them, to serve them, to be complaisant to them in imitating of them ; to accompany them in their false notions, or in their evil practices. So that the sum of the matter is this : God herein prohibits our conformity to a multitude of men, let the multitude be ever so great, in any thing that is contrary to his will, whether it be in doctrine or in practice. I proceeded after this explication to treat,

II. Of the great need of this precept. All God's precepts are useful ; but some have an extraordinary extensive influence. And it is remarkable that this precept is of very great importance, because it ought to influence the whole of our practice, as well as of our thoughts : and it is of general extent, as it strikes at an evil that is epidemical, which overspreads the world. I proposed to shew the necessity hereof,

I. By

I. By observing the extensiveness of the vice which it prohibits ; proving this in fact, by taking notice of what passes in the world at present, and what has been the custom of all nations, of all ages, ever since the fall of man. But I proposed farther under this head to inquire into the causes of the strange extent of this evil : for tho by proving in fact that it is an extensive vice, we shewed what need there was to give a precept against it ; yet by shewing what the principles of this vice are, what are the motives which engage men to govern themselves so, almost universally, we shall the more clearly see that there was abundance of need for God to give such a precept to declare his mind against that vice very expressly ; which, as it is a common vice, so likewise proceeds from such principles as are very common, and which it is very hard to hinder from having an influence upon our minds. I have shewn you the great need of this precept, in taking a general view of the state of the world at present ; where it is evident the generality of men are not governed by reason or by revelation, nor so much as consult either of them in the great and important matters of religion, and in the regulation of their lives ; or however if they do in some instances, yet they make not this the general rule of their conduct even in the most important matters. The generality content themselves in this, that they *follow the multitude* : they follow a

great number ; they do as others do, and therefore think they shall fare as well as others. This I have farther shewn, by looking back into times past : and in taking a view of the state of the world ever since the fall, it is easy to observe, that the generality of men, in all ages, have been governed by this principle ; and followed the multitude even in those things which were breaches and transgressions of the law of God. I come now,

2. To speak of the causes of this great mischief ; how it comes to pass that men *follow a multitude to do evil*, and have generally so done. And,

(1.) One great cause of this is stupidity and ignorance : I say, the stupidity and ignorance of many is the great cause of this vice. For, as we have in part seen already, and may more fully when we come into the farther discussion of this matter, it is the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world, and is a sign of gross ignorance and stupidity of mind. At least in abundance, this must be allowed to be the cause of this great evil ; that they do not so much as reason upon the matter ; they do not make a reflection in their own minds, whether it is proper for them to be governed by the vogue, by the multitude, or not. One would think it should be easy for them, if they would consider, to see that nothing can be more unjust

unjust and unreasonable than such a persuasion : and therefore that there are so many who *follow a multitude to do evil* ; that is, who transgress the law of God, because they see others do it before them, must needs arise from ignorance and stupidity in abundance. They do not seem to act so maliciously as some others do against the law of God ; but, without any examination of the matter, they think it is safe for them to do as others have done before them. They do not so much as inquire into the merit of the cause ; they have been educated after such a manner, and have been employed in things in the whole course of their lives which have so little reference to religion, that it would be a hard matter to put them upon thinking, if they are arrived to any considerable number of years. And therefore tho God hath given them faculties which might be improved ; the unhappy circumstances of their education, the manner of their lives, and the custom of sinning, the indulging their lusts, doth strangely stupify their minds, and render them ignorant to a very great degree. Tho their ignorance and stupidity is not invincible, yet it is a difficult thing to overcome it when it is so circumstanced. And I believe if it were possible to look perfectly into the special reasons of this vice, the *following a multitude to do evil* ; we should find ignorance and stupidity have as great a share in it as any thing else. For, is it possible

for those who are not very ignorant or very wicked, to satisfy themselves *to follow a multitude* to do that which is contrary to the law of God? But thus hath it been in the idolatrous nations. It were an easy matter to have reasoned with them, and shewn them that their idolatry was a most absurd and foolish thing, as well as very wicked. But they were incapable of receiving the impressions of truth, because they were educated in such a way, and were stupid and ignorant, not used to reason and argue. And this is too much the case of a great number of those who value themselves upon their pretended christianity, and yet never considered upon what grounds they took up their religion; but merely pride themselves in being christians, in bearing the name, because their ancestors did so; and because they live among a people who profess the same thing, and it is accounted reproachful in such a community not to be esteemed christians.

(2.) Another great reason hereof is laziness, and indifferency about the matters of religion. And this is too much the cause of this evil in them who have greater talents given them than those I spoke of before. Some who have more pregnant apprehensions, and are more capable of sifting things, and of digesting them in searching after truth, and perhaps have considerable time and leisure to do it, yet do not apply themselves to such a research; but merely out of a lazy temper

temper and disposition of mind, and from an indifferency to the things of religion, let these things pass on how they will, and take up with what is customary and common, without examining into matters, *what is the good and acceptable will of God.*

To search after truth requires some industry and pains; especially when it is considered how some have raised mists to blind the eyes of the generality of mankind by their perverse disputes, and by their subtle distinctions; by the prepossession wherewith they influence the minds of others. When we consider these things, it will appear, I say, that it requires some pains and application of mind for persons to search after *the good and acceptable will of God* in his word, and to inquire into the reason of things as they ought to do: for these are the two great kinds and means of instruction. God hath given us reason and revelation, the light of nature and that of scripture: there must be a revolving things in our thoughts, turning them on every side so far as we are capable: there must be a *searching the scriptures*, as the noble Bereans did, *to see whether the things are so or not*^v; whether they are as they are suggested to us or not. This requires some time, some pains, some thought: and men find it very difficult to apply themselves strictly to think of these matters, for

^v Acts 17. 11.

want of the habit of thinking. And therefore those who have employed their time almost thoughtlessly, who have only regarded their secular business, and have apprehended nothing more troublesome, or impracticable, than to apply themselves closely to trace the reason of things, and to compare one thing with another, that they might find the truth; they are discouraged upon this: and that they may indulge their idle and neglectful humour, choose rather to take up with the opinions of the multitude, tho they are likely to be in the wrong; and with their practices, however contrary to the divine law, than to search and examine what is the pleasure of God, how he will be served and worshiped, and what is the import of those precepts of his which ought to govern our lives. How many have excellent intellectual talents given them by God, as appears by the improvements they have made in arts and sciences, trade and business? yet these persons, out of a lazy humour in things of religion, will not advert to them, will not consider them, tho they may not only be capable of understanding the will of God, made known to us for the direction of our minds and consciences, but might be serviceable to others, in explaining the truth to them. But religion is so little at the bottom of some mens minds, and there is so strong a propension in them to employ themselves in any thing rather than looking into the
the

the truth ; and others are so diverted by the manner of their life, and by their evil habits, from thinking on any thing ; that it is no wonder, when these things are considered, there are so few who apply themselves to the means which God hath prescribed : and therefore they must either be of no religion at all, or else take up with the multitude. If they should not do this, it would be very strange. It must be very strange for those who do not examine things themselves, to follow the few, the least number ; for they are naturally led to conclude, that it is more prudent for them to take up their sentiments from the greatest number, because they think it is most likely they should be in the right.

(3.) Another reason of this is carnality of mind, the love of this world, and the things of it, and the fear of losing the advantages of this present life. This is a principle very copious, and produces those effects of which we are speaking. For a man to give himself a great deal of trouble to seek after truth, and, if he finds it, to fight with a multitude, of which perhaps many have got possession of a name for wisdom, and have learned the way of ruling the minds and consciences of others, and drawing multitudes after them ; this is to practise great self-denial. If persons, I say, will search after truth, they must oppose such as these, and oppose the multitude : but this brings enemies, this brings reproach upon them ;

this brings the loss of reputation ; and this exposes them, many times, to very violent effects of the malice of great men, and sometimes of the multitude. The way for a man to establish himself, to secure and advance himself in the world, is *to follow the multitude* ; to swim with the stream ; to be complaisant to all, or to the greatest part of mankind ; to suit his pretended notions to those of others ; to accommodate himself to the customs and practices which he finds have been established by a long tract of time, and kept up by a great number of people. These things do not shock a man's honour and reputation amongst men, but tend to establish his worldly interest. This puts him into the way of getting honour : for by how much the more we render ourselves acceptable amongst men, so much the more opportunity we have of raising ourselves, and are able to make use of the greater numbers to serve us, than otherwise we could do. So that men find this so commodious for themselves, that they forget the commands of God, and apply themselves to the notions which are common, and in greatest esteem in the world ; and to those practices and customs which have gained reputation by a long prescription, and by the vogue of the multitude.

These things are evident in themselves, to every one who will seriously consider the matter. And could any thing else be expected,

pected, according to the course of human things? Hath it not been the experience of all ages, that those people who would advance doctrines different from those which are commonly received, tho they could prove them by reason and scripture against the multitude, have met with very ill usage; and that they who have differed from the generality of mankind in their practice, especially in relation to the worship of God, have met with the severest afflictions and persecutions? And what, I say, could less be expected? Men like and love that which is like themselves; and they hate that which is contrary. They must know how to govern their passions well, who can find others contradict their notions and principles upon which they value themselves, and yet not be moved with some kind of indignation against them. When they see men set up practices which condemn theirs, and perhaps bring theirs under the notion of idolatry and superstition; this raises in their minds strange passions. In consequence whereof, they who do so, must expect to meet with opposition in the world; and must therefore forego their worldly advantages, if they will not *follow the multitude to do evil.*

Those indeed who search after the will of God after the manner that he hath prescribed, in all appearance are the most likely to find it: and if they find the truth, it is certain they have better arguments to defend it

it than their adversaries have to defend errors. But nothing is more common, than for those who have not arguments sufficient to support what they maintain, to act as if they could supply that defect with their inordinate passions. They violently go about to resist and to persecute those who differ from them. So that if a man consults himself upon the principles of flesh and blood ; if he have no farther view than to secure and promote his temporal interest, and to avoid the inconveniences of the troubles of this world ; he must accommodate himself to the multitude. And this is one great reason why so many *follow the multitude to do evil*. It is because they would avoid the reproaches and persecutions of men, and be in the fairer way to get friends and reputation in the world ; and furnish themselves with such sensual pleasures as may gratify their carnal appetites. Sensuality is the principal thing which governs their souls : they have a greater gust for temporal things than they have for any spiritual advantages.

Now upon the whole : if we consider how many are stupid and ignorant to a great degree ; how many are lazy and negligent, and indifferent about the matters of religion ; and how many in the world seek to secure themselves, to establish themselves and their families, and get wealth and reputation amongst men, who *seek honour from men, rather*

ther than the honour that comes from God^w ; if these are the principles which govern the generality of men ; then certainly, seeing these principles tend to *make them follow the multitude to do evil*, it was very needful God should give such a precept as this is. And therein we may see his wisdom and his goodness, as well as his holiness and justice. For there are no principles in the world more common than those I have spoken of ; and none more proper, it seems, to indulge men in this vice, which is so contrary to the divine command we have been explaining. There was therefore great reason and need of such a command as this is. And by how much the more necessary it is, so much the more attention we should give to it ; lest we be *led away with the error of the wicked^x*, and fall into the same prejudices with others, and at last into the same condemnation. I proceed now,

III. To shew you the justice and reasonableness of this command. And that will appear by the injustice and unreasonableness of the vice which it condemns, as well as the unreasonableness of that vice will appear by the reasonableness of this command.

It were endless to enumerate the considerations which would prove this matter. It may be made to appear just and reasonable from

^w John 5. 44.

| ^x 2 Pet. 3. 17.

the plain assertions of the holy scriptures : which is a sufficient argument amongst those who hold the scriptures to be the word of God : *i. e.* amongst christians ; for we can see no farther than God has revealed. And yet even among these we shall find many who *follow the multitude to do evil* ; tho it is expressly forbidden in this text, and tho there are many other texts to the same purpose. What are all those remonstrances of the prophets, wherein they blame the people for following the customs of the heathen, their neighbours, round about them ? What is the reason of so many prohibitions to hinder the people from *following the multitude to do evil* ? All the commendations they give to those who made it their practice to separate from the multitude, and to be governed by the divine word ; these were declarations to the same purpose, that the multitude is not to be followed in any thing that is evil. All the revelations of God's righteous judgments in punishing even his own people when they were guilty of this sin, are so many declarations how contrary that vicious practice is to his rule. All that is said by our Saviour, and by his apostles, when they vindicate themselves against the popular prejudices of their differing from others, and from great men ; all they say in defense of themselves, is a confirmation of this thing. When our Saviour commands us to *take up our cross, and deny ourselves, and follow*

follow him, if we would be his disciples^y; this shews we must oppose the current of the world. When the apostles are censured before princes for preaching of Jesus, they say; *Whether it be right to obey God or man, judge ye*^z. This principle, this maxim, is to the same purpose with our text. For, if we must *obey God rather than men*^a; then we must not disobey God in complaisance to any great men, or to ever so great a multitude of men. All the declarations which Christ makes, and the notice he takes of the smallness of the number of those who fear God, in comparison of others; all this is a proof that the greatest numbers are in the wrong. *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*^b. The church of Christ is but a *little flock*, in comparison to the opposite multitude. If therefore we would follow the church of Christ; if we would be safe in regard of the fundamental principles of religion; we must not judge according to the greatest number of mankind. And we must not judge of truth in all the instances of its discovery, even where there is the church of Christ; because no church of Christ is infallible. *To the law, and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*^c. God hath left us his word for a

^y Mark 8. 34.^z Acts 4. 19.^a Chap. 5. 29.^b Luke 12. 32.^c Isa. 8. 20.

rule : and no number of men are to determine what is truth, and what is error ; but the word of God only is to give us a determination in that matter.

All the bright examples we have in scripture of a practice conformable to the precept in our text, the many instances of those who would not *follow a multitude to do evil*, prove to us how reasonable and just it is ; seeing those to whom God himself has given the most commendable characters, submitted to this rule, and opposed the vice which it condemns, in that they would not *follow the multitude to do evil*. *Enoch walked with God*^d, tho he seems to have walked almost alone in the old world. But he was soon taken to a place where there was no such solitude ; *to an innumerable company of angels*, to whose company his life was so conformable. *The wickedness of men was great ; and all flesh had corrupted his way*^e. What a character therefore had Noah given him, that he bore a testimony against the corrupt notions and practices of the old world ; and was a *preacher of righteousness* in such a time of wickedness ? And what an eminent reward did God give him in saving him and his family, when he swept away all mankind ? Are not these declarations how God approves of those who will not *follow the multitude to do evil* ? Abram was a generous example of the like

^d Gen. 5. 24.

^e Chap. 6. 12.

kind :

kind : he *forsook his country, and his kindred, and his father's house* ^f ; and was so far from *following the multitude to do evil*, that he would forsake all the advantages of the family to which he belonged ; and did actually forsake all to follow God, tho he *knew not whither he went* ^g, rather than he would follow the corrupt practices of the place where he lived. When the prophet complains that he was *left alone* ^h, he himself knew that he was not to *follow the multitude to do evil*, if he had been alone : tho indeed God had *seven thousand men reserved* at that time, *who would not bow their knee to Baal* ⁱ. When the prophet did not know there was such a number of men left, he knew it was his duty to be alone rather than to *follow the multitude to do evil* ; and that seven thousand was but a small number in comparison of the much greater number of idolaters in that nation.

It were easy to enumerate instances : particularly the obedience of the three children, Shadrac, Meshech, and Abednego ; who would hearken rather to the voice of God's holy law than to Nebuchadnezzar ; and would distinguish themselves, when the people of so many nations and kingdoms, as one man, threw themselves at the feet of the idol. These would submit to the fury of the fiery furnace, rather than do that great evil.

^f Gen. 12. 1.

^g Heb. 11. 8.

^h 1 Kings 19. 14.

ⁱ Ver. 18.

The like may be said of the apostles and primitive christians, and of the martyrs in succeeding ages ; who are so many instances of obedience to God in conformity to this precept. And certainly such *a cloud of witnesses*, who are recorded in the word of God with so much honour and applause, are intended as so many motives to us, that we should follow their example. Here is therefore a testimony, from God himself, how much he approves our acting against the stream of evil customs and practices.

But, besides this, there are many proofs which may be brought from the reason and nature of the thing itself. It is no difficult matter to shew you the great absurdity of *following the multitude to do evil* ; the great uncertainty there is in taking such a measure ; the little security that men can boast themselves to have, when they take this course, and satisfy themselves upon such slender grounds that they are safe. But these things would lead me to too great a length at present : and therefore I shall conclude in making a reflection or two ; and refer the arguing the matter, and shewing the absurdity of it, to another season.

1. If it be so needful that such a precept as this should be given, as appears by the general corruption of the minds and manners of men, and the course of their lives, and their dispositions and inclinations : then this
2 shews

shews God's great wisdom, as well as his goodness, in discovering to us the great perfection of his holy law : that this precept, of which we have so great need, should be not only given in terms so express, but in other texts which speak to the same purpose ; and wherein there are words of the like import. And not only so : but the same divine wisdom and goodness are discovered to us by the manifold judgments of God which have been displayed against those who have *followed a multitude to do evil* ; and the great applause and honour which he has bestowed on those, in his word, who have followed him, in opposition to the multitude ; to men famous for wisdom and power, who have opposed their practice, and sometimes have persecuted them to death upon that account. As the precept is good in itself, so it is inculcated on our minds after an excellent manner. The word of God furnishes us with the strongest reasons, and the most favourable motives, to engage us to follow the example of those excellent persons who would *obey God rather than men*^k ; who would conform themselves to his will, rather than to the humours of men ; who would do as God commanded them, tho they were alone, rather than *follow a multitude to do evil*.

2. Here we may see, with shame and disgrace, the violent degeneracy of human

^k Acts 5. 29.

nature: that notwithstanding the plainness of the divine precepts, and, I may add, the reasonableness of them, which we shall have a farther occasion to prove; yet the generality of men act contrary to the divine will in this instance. Who is willing to *receive the truth in the love of it*¹? Who are they that choose the honour of God rather than that of men; and are willing to be as it were alone, rather than be without the company of the truth? who will sacrifice the applauses of the multitude to the will of God, and his approbation? The happy few shall indeed be owned of God, who will say to them, *Well done, good and faithful servants*^m. But how many will rather expose themselves to the judgments of heaven, that they may hear the flattering shout of the multitude; as Herod did? *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man*ⁿ. How foolish and ridiculous, many times, are the censures of the multitude; and how vain and unworthy their applause? And what a foolish and unreasonable thing then is it for men to buy their good opinion at so dear a rate as the exposing themselves to the severe censures of the Almighty himself? What an amazing folly, to fear the reproaches of an unthinking multitude, who have no right to determine our religious opinions and practices, rather than to fear that wise and righteous God to whom

¹ 2 Thess. 2. 10.^m Mat. 25. 21.ⁿ Acts 12. 22.

we are accountable for all our notions, and all our actions; and who is not only able to vindicate his own honour, but has sufficiently declared he will severely punish those who contemn his authority? How much is it to be lamented that such base principles as ignorance and stupidity, laziness, thoughtless indifferency and carelessness in matters of religion, sensuality and carnality of mind; that such base principles as these should so govern men, as to make them persuade themselves that they are very safe, and that they act well, because they act conformably to the multitude; as if their principles and practices must of course be good in themselves, and would certainly produce good effects, because they have a great number on their side? The sin is the more to be abhorred, and, with the greater strictness, to be avoided. It is so far from being a reason to do any thing which is evil, that it is a reason against it. If the multitude do evil, then the more reason have we to act contrary to them. And, if there are hardly any to speak for God's truth and honour; it becomes those who love him in sincerity and truth, to think themselves obliged to speak, when there is almost an universal silence: when there are many who speak against the truth contained in the divine word, it is then certainly the time for us to contend for it.

To conclude : let us endeavour seriously to examine ourselves, whether such principles as these have govern'd us, and to what degree : whether we have not taken up some opinions without considering whether they are true or not, because they were embraced by some who went before us ; or done some things without considering whether they were lawful or not, because others did the same. If we have not followed this precept in these instances, we ought to be humbled that we have had no more regard to this divine and express command, and to others, of the like import, contained in the word of God. We ought to be humbled wherein we have prevaricated ; and wherein we have acted unbecoming ourselves, and unsuitable to the divine requirements. And we ought to make this the strict rule of our conduct for time to come ; that we will not follow the giddy multitude, and take things from them, but from God ; that we will consider the notions we have received, and compare them with the scriptures, and conform the sentiments of our minds to them, according only as they agree with that sacred standard ; and that we will consider our practices, and maintain or reject them, as they stand approved or condemned by the word of God. If we thus seek the truth, no doubt but we shall find it. We shall have occasion to bless God that he opens our eyes, and gives us light into the knowledge of his will,
when

when once we seek him after such a manner as this. But the main reason why so many seem to seek and do not find, is because before they have made such a research as they ought to do, they are willing to shut their eyes, and divert their thoughts from the consideration of the reason of the things, and to determine themselves according to the customs of the times and people amongst whom they live, rather than conform themselves purely and intirely to the word of God. We should labour hard therefore to divest our minds of all kind of prejudices, that so we may devote ourselves to that God who hath given us reason and revelation to guide and conduct us; that we may not entertain an *error in our right hand* °, or *hide any iniquity as a sweet morsel under our tongue* p; but conform ourselves to that *doctrine which is according to godliness* q; and our lives to that practice which is agreeable to the scriptures of truth.

° Isa. 44. 20.
p Job. 20. 12.

q 1 Tim. 6. 3.





S E R M O N III.

Preach'd at

PINNERS-HALL, December 16, 1704.

EXOD. xxiii. 2.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.—

The third S E R M O N on this text.



YOU may remember that I proposed,

I. To explain these words.

II. To shew the necessity of this precept.

III. To speak of the justice and reasonableness of it, by shewing the injustice and unreasonableness of that vice it prohibits.

The text hath been explained. And I have shewn you, that to *do evil*, signifies to commit sin: and comprehends every thing that may be called a transgression of the divine law, whether in our thoughts, words, or actions; whether by committing what is abso-

Serm. III. *The danger of following, &c.* 55

absolutely evil, or omitting what is good, or our duty to do; whether it be by entertaining errors, contrary to *the form of sound words*^r, or by the practice of sins prohibited by the divine laws. We are to abstain from all these evils; nay, from the very *appearance of evil*^r. And we are to use no excuse, however plausible, to palliate and extenuate our crimes. We are not to think it sufficient that there is the pattern and example of others, tho ever so great in number or dignity. For, we are not to *follow the multitude to do evil*. We are not to follow the great numbers of men; or those who are great in quality, as some interpret the words. We are not to attend them, to wait upon them, to imitate them, to obey them, to accompany them in any thing which is contrary to the divine will. This is the substance of what the precept prohibits; our committing of sin, in complaisance to any numbers of men whatsoever.

I have also insisted upon the great need there is of such a precept as this. Indeed the reason of the thing shews that men ought to collect the substance of this precept, from many others, if it had not been expressed: but that God, who knows the hearts of men, and knew how they would be prone to this kind of vice, hath been pleased to give an express and particular command against it.

^r 2 Tim. 1. 13.

| ^r 1 Thess. 5. 22.

I have shewn you the need of this, by taking a view of the present state of the world : and, upon examination, we have found that nothing is more common than this, to *follow the multitude to do evil*. We have looked back upon times past, and taken a general view of the world in its former state : and we find what Solomon says to be true in this case, as well as in others ; *There is no new thing under the sun*^s. The same prejudices have prevailed in times past as well as now : it has been too much the practice of all ages to take the easiest and readiest way, and to *follow the multitude to do evil*.

We have shewn you the need of this precept moreover, by inquiring into the principles of this great mischief it opposes. 1. Ignorance and stupidity. 2. Laziness, and indifferency about duty, and things of the greatest consequence. And, 3. A worldly frame of spirit, whereby men have sought the pleasures, the honours, the riches, the friends of this world, and sacrificed all to them.

Some are very stupid and ignorant : and many times it is an ignorance which they have brought upon themselves, and what we call a wilful or an affected ignorance. So great is the ignorance and stupidity of men ; partly from this wilfulness, and partly from the circumstances of their lives, and the manner of

• Eccles. 1. 9.

their education, and the affairs of the world in which they are engaged; that in many instances they hardly cast about, or think what is truth, or what is error, what is good, and what is bad; but conclude they are safe in *following the multitude*.

Others, again, have greater parts, and more time; and God hath given them many advantages for the investigation of truth, if they would improve them: but thro' laziness, and softness of temper; thro' a criminal indifferency about this matter, which tho it would indeed take up their thoughts and their time, yet it would entertain them most agreeably and profitably; they abandon the disquisition of truth and religion to others, and take the common road of *following the multitude*, tho they go blindfold after them: and commonly this issues in destruction.

Another principle is carnality of mind. Men are so debauched and corrupted in their minds by the things of this world, by places of honour and dignity, by carnal pleasures, and the riches of this world, that they think it would be a very great piece of self-denial to abandon the multitude; and consequently conclude it is best for them to choose blindfold that which they know not whether it be good or evil; or sometimes to choose that which they know is evil, because they would comply with others, and be complaisant to those on whom they imagine their temporal prosperity

prosperity to depend. This is indeed a sordid and very unbecoming temper : but there is nothing more common in the world. Was there ever any religion set up in any nation, but the generality would follow it ? Was there any change of religion for the better, or worse, but the generality would pursue it ; externally at least ? Which shews that men do not govern themselves by right, and wrong ; by considering what is right, and what is wrong ; by considering what is truth, and what is error ; that they may choose the one, and refuse the other : but by observing what other people do ; by considering how they may best establish their reputation here, and procure the greatest numbers of friends, advance themselves to posts of honour in the world, and gratify their sensual inclinations with all the pleasures of this life.

Now seeing these are the principles of action which influence the generality of mankind, and these are the worst that can be ; (for what can be worse than stupidity, laziness, and carnality of mind) you see what great necessity there was that God should give such a law as this ; what great need the world had of it. Tho indeed it is to be greatly lamented that it is so little regarded ; yet what institution could be more extensively necessary and useful than such an one as this, which is to restrain an epidemical disease, and to engage men to consider themselves and their duty ; to avoid a practice
which

which hath obtained upon the generality of their fellow-creatures, a practice of such dangerous tendency. I now proceed,

III. To speak of the justice and reasonableness of this law, by shewing the unreasonableness of the evil it prohibits; by shewing you what a very ill thing it is, and how very unreasonable, for persons to *follow the multitude to do evil*. I know not whether I need, by the way, obviate what it is possible some may object; that such a discourse tends to make the few the patterns we ought to follow, instead of a multitude. But I answer; that those who attend to what hath been already said, and may consider what will be farther advanced on this subject, will find that our design is not to make either the multitude, or the few, the standard of our practice. We are *to follow none to do evil*; either the few, or the multitude: and therefore we do not pretend to shew that in every case, where there are but a few of an opinion, that opinion must needs be right; or that those things which are practised only by a few, must needs be right, because but a few practise them. There may be some instances wherein the multitude may be in the right, and the few in the wrong: and therefore we must not take that for a test. The word of God is the rule whereby we are to conduct ourselves; and not men of low or high degree, of lesser or of greater numbers.

bers. Tho it is certain that the truth is more commonly found amongst a few than the great many ; yet this is to be no rule for us to go by. We are to consider things abstractly from the practice of men, and to reduce all to the divine word : *To the law, and to the testimony* ^t.

But now I apply myself to speak of the unreasonableness and injustice of this proceeding, *to follow a multitude to do evil* ; and thereby to vindicate the justice of this law which forbids it. And,

1. The unreasonableness of this will appear, if we consider the nature of the things themselves ; that truth and error, good and evil, are not dependent upon the humours of men. Truth is an independent thing ; and so likewise goodness : these do not depend upon the will of man. And, as the apostles said of themselves, *Paul an apostle, not of man, or of the will of man, but of God* ^u ; so I may say concerning truth and righteousness, they are *not of the will of man, but of God* : and therefore the nature of them can never be altered. It is a most unreasonable thing to call things directly contrary to what they are : to call darkness light, and light darkness ; that which is bitter, to call it sweet, and that which is sweet, bitter ; to put good for evil, and evil for good ^v. Of this, God hath declared his abhorrence.

^t Isa. 8. 20.

^u Gal. 1. 1. 2 Cor. 1. 1.

^v Isa. 5. 20.

And if it be unreasonable for men to call a thing by a name which is directly contrary to its nature, and act towards it as if it were quite another thing than what it is; then it is so much the more absurd, by how much the more important the things are we inquire about. It is a foolish and absurd thing for a man to say the sun does not shine in the middle of the day: yet this is not an error of great importance, because it would not do others or himself such abundance of hurt. But if men entertain errors which are destructive of their souls, the consequence of the errors renders them exceeding fatal: and, if they reject truths which are of the highest consequence to the salvation of their souls; the importance of the truths makes their errors so very dangerous.

And the same may be said of good and evil. If a man would stupify himself, as the Stoicks pretended to do, and call pain a good thing, or deny it to be an evil, in spite of the testimonies of his senses; one might laugh at his folly, or pity the distemper'd humour of a person who would speak thus against common sense. But what great hurt would this do, if a man could imagine his pain to be lighter than others, and were pleased to call it by the wrong name of pleasure? But when men shall act towards God, and the affairs of another world after such a manner as to deprive themselves of everlasting happiness thro' their folly, and involve themselves

selves in eternal mischief and ruin ; this is to be lamented, because of the fatal consequences which attend it.

It is therefore a great absurdity that men put truth for error, and error for truth, good for evil, and evil for good, because they find other people do so ; when it is certain that these things are of such an invariable nature that they cannot be changed. This thing is not good, either the more or less, because the multitude think it so, or do not think it so : and another thing is not the less truth, because the multitude think it so, or think the contrary. Seeing therefore the things about which we are concerned are of such a nature that they do not depend upon the humours or fancies of men, but they are invariably the same ; since that which is in its own nature true, and just and good, is so, and will be so, let all the world speak the contrary of it ; since that which is false, and vicious and vile, will be so, if there be the voice of all mankind to the contrary ; since the nature of the things themselves cannot be altered by great numbers, and they cannot give authority to any thing which ought not to be : hence it appears to be an absurd thing *to follow the multitude to do evil* ; because they cannot alter the nature of it in the least.

2. The absurdity hereof is demonstrated, if we consider it with reference to God ; how high a contempt of his authority it is, and

and how much it reflects upon his dignity and sovereignty. For it is, in effect, for men to set up their fellow-creatures in opposition to the divine majesty. God hath declared what is true, and what is good ; what he would have us to believe and practise. Now to transgress his laws ; this is evil, this is sin : and *following the multitude* will not make amends for such a crime as this is. The question is, *Whether we should obey God or men* ^w ? If men : we set them in the place of God, and declare that we love God less than our fellow-creatures, or regard our own temporal advantages more than his law ; that we prefer a poor ignorant creature, who is but of yesterday, or a great many ignorant ones, who *are but of yesterday, and know nothing* ^x, to him who *is from everlasting* ^y, and *is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever* ^z. We prefer their dictates to his precepts, who *is truth itself ; who is infinitely wise, and knoweth all things*. We prefer them who may deceive us, and may be deceived themselves ; and who are many times so vile, that they will deceive maliciously, as well as ignorantly : we prefer these, I say, before God, who cannot be deceived, because he is infinitely knowing and wise ; and cannot deceive others, because he is infinitely good and just.

^w Acts 4. 19.^x Job 8. 9.^y Psal. 90. 2.^z Heb. 13. 8.

Can any thing be a greater affront to the majesty of God, than that persons should pretend to excuse themselves to his face for breaking his laws, because others of his creatures have done it? If multitudes have rebell'd against him, and broken his holy commandments, there is certainly the more reason we should keep them. Can any one think this is a good rule, that when the Almighty hath told us what we should do, we take the quite contrary course, because the greatest number of our fellow-creatures have acted after such a manner? No, certainly! right reason will teach us to argue quite otherwise. *They have corrupted their way upon earth*; therefore should we reform. They have abandoned themselves to innumerable evils; therefore we should set examples becoming rational creatures, and those who profess to worship the true God; should *search after the truth, receive it in the love of it*, and endeavour to engage others in the same inquiry, and in the same becoming practice.

3. As it is an high affront unto the majesty of God to *follow the multitude to do evil*, because it is to pay that homage and respect to them which is owing to God himself, and to none but him; so likewise it is doing violence and injustice to our own reason, and our own consciences. And methinks an argument which comes so near our own souls, or our reason and conscience, should a little affect

affect us. If other people speak against our reason, against our understanding; how prone are we to be affronted? Many can rather suffer the imputation of dishonesty, than to be esteemed weak in their intellects. To be accounted a fool, is an intolerable imputation to the generality of men. So tender are we of this part of our character, that if there be never so great a deficiency in our understandings, yet we affect to be accounted wise. This is the general desire of mankind: and certainly then, if other people affront us, as we are rational creatures, when they do not ascribe to us such a measure of good sense and reason as we think we deserve; if, I say, we are so much concerned about this, it is very strange that we should be so easily engaged to affront our reason after a more intolerable manner, as we do in this instance, when we *follow the multitude to do evil.*

Consider what a wise choice a man makes when he *follows the multitude to do evil!* He chooses *darkness rather than light, and evil before good:* and, with respect to the persons to whom he commits the conduct of himself, he makes a very miserable choice indeed; as you have heard, in some degree, already. A miserable choice! to take himself from under the conduct of God, and put himself under the conduct of men. Sinful, ignorant, mistaken men! he chooses to guide him, instead of that God who is possessed of

all perfections ; who is infinitely knowing, wise, holy, just, and good.

But let us consider the thing in itself, the choosing the multitude to walk by. Consider it naturally ; and you'll see what an imprudent choice a man makes who walks by this rule. This multitude is made up of individuals : be it ever so numerous, it still consists of a great number of single persons collected together. Now if we are to be determined by the whole multitude ; if there be any reason in such a choice, it must be because we suppose, on the account of their numbers, they are likely to be more in the right at least, and so it is safest to follow them. But examine this multitude, and consider each particular person : it may be you who are willing to follow this multitude out of laziness, or some other cause as bad or worse, cannot find persons, one of a hundred amongst them, who knows any more of the matter than yourself. And can these be fit to direct you ? Is it safe to be guided thus by the ignorant, who know no more than yourselves, or perhaps a great deal less ? Will any man leave his trade or business to the conduct of those who were never acquainted with it in their lives, because he hath got a considerable number of unexpert men who know nothing of the matter ? Is he like to thrive, because he follows the direction of a great number of those who have never had
any

any experience or knowledge in his affairs, and so know not how to give him advice?

And farther, consider, that as this is the general vogue of the world, *to follow the multitude*; so do individuals generally take the same method. There is not one in a great number who takes up his principles and practices from reason and scripture; but merely because others have judged so before him. Their ancestors, those who have lived before them, have gone in the same road: and they take things upon trust, just as they find them, according to the vogue of tradition. What is the sense then of *following the multitude to do evil*? Why, it is for *the blind to lead the blind*^a; which is a folly, to a proverb. When the way we are to go is difficult, and a mistake so hazardous; when the interest of our souls depends on taking the right path, and eternal happiness or misery are the two extremes, in one of which our journey must certainly terminate; 'tis strange stupidity to put ourselves under the conduct of blind men: and this because there is a multitude of them. Are such fit to direct others, who are not capable of seeing their own way? When the individuals of which the multitude is compos'd are examined, those who are considerate will be found to be but few, and the far greater part to know nothing at all. Therefore that which makes up the

^a Mat. 15. 14.

great number, can, to a wise and thinking man, give no weight at all to the argument, to the principle or practice, of which the inquiry is made. For, wherever there is a nation of people, or a great multitude, who entertain some certain principle or practice; you may take it for granted, for it will always be found upon examination to be true, that the greatest part are ignorant. And therefore it is the lesser number, even of that multitude, who are the most likely to be in the right. Those who have never thought, never judged, never weighed, or tried a matter; as they have not a capacity, so how should they have a right and authority, to instruct and manage the minds of others? If we were to be governed by human authority, the multitude is certainly the most unfit in the world; for the greatest part never thought seriously and strictly, so as to come at any reasonable knowledge of things. You see therefore what an absurd and ridiculous thing it is *to follow the multitude*; especially to follow the multitude in opposition to the commands of God. It is a foolish thing *to follow the multitude* in any thing which is detrimental to us. But in matters of conscience, and religion, either in principle or practice, to give up ourselves to the conduct of the multitude; you see how absurd that is, when the greatest part know not how to guide themselves.

4. As we have considered the greatest part of the multitude, and found them to be ignorant ; let us take a view of the lesser part of this multitude, the more thinking and learned part of them. These are men, perhaps, of good natural capacities; men of learning, and good education, men of authority, &c. But yet how can we be safe even under the conduct of these, if we have no other rule ? for the generality of the *wise* and *learned*, and *noble* in this world, as they opposed our Lord Jesus Christ when he was here on earth, so how do we know that they do not oppose him still ? It is very plain that this part of the multitude, the dignified amongst them, very often prescribe things contrary to the word of God. These men therefore are not to be followed : they are biased as well as others : they court the multitude, as the multitude follows them. They are on the side of the multitude, because perhaps they find their account in it : and therefore tho their heads are better furnished than others, yet their hearts are no better than the rest. As they pay their homage to the multitude ; so they know the multitude will, in return, pay theirs to them. *To follow the multitude* is the way to get preferment. How often therefore are evil practices introduced by those who know better, only in complaisance to the multitude ? What an absurdity then is it *to follow the multitude*, if the greatest part of them be ignorant ; and the lesser part of

them, the men of dignity, authority, and learning, are so liable to be biassed, and corrupted; and, to serve their secular interests, to be led the wrong way? Not that all do so: but this is most frequently and commonly the case. And this shews us, that it is the greatest folly in the world, and the most unsafe thing that can be, *to follow the multitude.* And therefore we should cleave to the word of God, and examine all things by that.

Nay, I might push the matter farther: Where there are a great many good men; to follow them implicitly, would be an unreasonable way of proceeding. For, good men are not always wise: good men may be mistaken; and they often are so. There is no good man will pretend to infallibility. There is no such thing. For, as *men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lye*^b; so good men themselves have been deceived, and have deceived others. Some, who have made a great and a specious appearance of being good men, have been but hypocrites at the bottom. Others, who are really good men, may be deceived themselves, and so may deceive others. And we sometimes see that even good men can hardly so divest their minds of honour and reputation amongst men, but they will love to have a little authority over other people; and therefore

^b Psal. 62. 9.

do not care to explain things so clearly and fully to them as they should, but would have them take things, in some measure, upon their word. There is too much of this even amongst those who are really good. All which shews it is unsafe to trust the multitude, or the better part of the multitude. We should be at a strange loss about this matter, if we had not the rule of God's word to go by. You see, I say, how absurd a thing it is *to follow the multitude*: for if you take this multitude to pieces, there is no ground at all to go upon. The greatest part are ignorant, and know nothing; and the other part may lead us astray: the first sort have no eyes, *and cannot see*; and the other may be mistaken themselves, and will be very likely to deceive us. So that consequently it is doing a violence to our own reason, *to follow the multitude to do evil*; to make them our rule.

5. This will farther appear, if you consider that by the same way of reasoning we shall never know where to rest. For if we *follow the multitude to do evil*, and this be a rule, that a man must follow a multitude; where will this multitude be fixed? It will reach all other nations and countries; and then the multitude in one country, will be excluded by a greater number in another: and so all the lesser nations must conform to the greater, till there be an uniformity in the whole. A project which it is absolutely impossible to

effect : for if this be the rule, then the generality of men, their principles and practices, are to be accounted the standard of the consciences of all the rest ; which can never be known till we know the sentiments of all the men in the world, as well as those of our own nation.

6. The absurdity of this farther appears, because this would be to make the multitude which was one time a rule in the world, not to be so another time ; and here would be confusion another way. For instance, in this nation. The multitude of our fore-fathers, before christianity, were Pagans : if it was fit *to follow that multitude* ; then it was not fit to entertain christianity. The multitude of our fore-fathers two or three hundred years ago, were of the Romish communion, entertained their corrupt notions, and practised their idolatries : if it were fit *to follow the multitude to do evil* ; then there ought never to have been a reformation. And the same may be said concerning other nations. Here would therefore be a perplexing difficulty. If this were the maxim, *to follow the multitude* ; the question would be, what multitude ? If of the same nation : the multitude of this age, in this nation, are for protestantism ; a few ages before, for popery ; and, before popery, for paganism. If it be said, they are in the right whom we find in possession ; then, it seems, all these were right in their turns. So that
if

if we had lived in the times of paganism, or popery, we had had the same reason to have followed them then, as we have to follow the multitude of protestants now. If we have no other reason than the *following the multitude*; this reason will do for all religions, and all times. And as this makes a great confusion between light and darkness, good and evil; so you see how contradictory it is in itself, and absurd to every man's view who will attend to it.

7. The unreasonableness of this piece of conduct, and the reasonableness of God's law against it, will farther appear, in that this is *to justify the wicked, and condemn the righteous; which are both alike abomination to the Lord*^c. To follow the multitude to do evil, is to justify the wicked in all generations of the world, as well as in our own; and to condemn the righteous likewise, in all generations. And if either of these be *an abomination to the Lord*; how great an abomination must that be in which they are both united?

It is, I say, *to justify the wicked*. For, I have shewed you before, that thro'out the several ages of the world this hath been the custom of the wicked, to follow the greatest numbers, and to govern themselves by the caprice of the multitude; and not by the reason of things, and the word of God.

^c Prov. 17. 15.

Then,

Then, as it is *to justify the wicked*; so it is *to condemn the righteous*. It is to condemn the innocent, who would not *follow the multitude to do evil*; but would *obey God, rather than all mankind together*^d. And can any man deserve the name of a christian, who governs himself by such a principle as this is; “that he ought to follow great numbers of people, without considering whether the thing be good or just, true or false, that he is to believe or practise as the multitude does;” when there is this great absurdity attending it, that this will condemn all the saints and martyrs, thro’out all ages of the world, who went another way? If you do well in *following the multitude*, then they did ill who did not. If you are in the right, you certainly call them fools, who suffered as they did, for their opposition to the iniquities of the times wherein they lived; when they should rather have conformed to the evil principles and practices of the multitude. You condemn Noah and Enoch, and all the patriarchs after the flood, who opposed the current of errors, and of sins in their times. You do, in effect, say that Noah should have *followed the multitude*; which if he had done, he would have perished with the old world: that Enoch should have *followed the multitude*, instead of *walking with God*^e; but if so, he had never been translated into that

^d Acts 5. 29.| ^e Gen. 5. 22.

blest society above. If Abraham had *followed the multitude*, he had never been the *father of the faithful*^f; never had had those gracious promises and favours bestowed upon him, which are recorded in scripture.

If all should have *followed the multitude*, God would have had no church in the world; nor could history have furnished us with any account of the sufferings of martyrs. If this doctrine be true, that *the multitude* ought to be followed: then Daniel, and the three children, acted a very foolish part in exposing themselves to the jaws of hungry lions, and the flames of a fiery furnace; they would never, if they had been wise, have exposed themselves to these miseries. If we are for *following a multitude to do evil*: we condemn those excellent persons, the prophets, who suffered by the multitude for speaking the truth: we condemn those who suffered martyrdom under the old testament, and *did not accept of deliverance*^g; tho we find the apostle commends them for it.

And under the new testament, what *clouds of witnesses* are there to the same purpose? To *follow the multitude to do evil*; this is to condemn the apostles, and others, who were martyrs for Jesus. Those who were put to death by innumerable kinds of torment; those who glorified God in the flames, and *loved not their lives*, but exposed themselves to the

^f Rom. 4. 16.

| ^g Heb. 11. 35.

worst of deaths for the word of God, and *for the testimony of Jesus*; we condemn them all as persons who were guilty of self-murder, and exposed themselves to these sufferings even for the sake of error: for this was their error, and for which they suffered, because they did not *follow the multitude*. If to *follow the multitude* be to do good, and to be in the right: then to follow the saints and martyrs of Jesus, who were but few; this is to be in an error, to be in darkness, and *to do evil*. I do not think any one reasons after this manner. But the *following the multitude*, tends to lead men into this way of reasoning: and they who practise it must, in effect, *condemn the righteous*, as well as *justify the wicked*, in all generations.

8. It is most absurd and unreasonable to *follow the multitude to do* any thing which is *evil*; because they are neither to judge us, nor can they protect us. If the multitude could insure us, that it would be safe for us to trust in their conduct; if they could save us from that power which will call us to account; then there might be something said in their behalf: or, if they were to try us themselves, then we might expect possibly to meet with a favourable judgment from them. But is the multitude to judge us? No. But *God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the secrets of all men, by the man Christ Jesus*^h. We must all stand before the

^h Acts 17. 31. Rom. 2. 16.

tribunal of God. And then how much will they be confounded, who pleased themselves in this world with hopes of safety from the multitude they followed? When the wicked shall *call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them*ⁱ; then it will be in vain to cite prescription, and say this or that was the opinion or practice of *the multitude*. May not our Lord be supposed to reply, “The
 “multitude was not your rule; my word
 “was your rule: and I, and my prophets,
 “and apostles, were your patterns. You
 “should have followed this *little flock*^k; nor
 “them neither, any farther than they fol-
 “lowed me, and my word.” The word of Christ, as it is now the rule of our thoughts and practice, so it will hereafter be the rule of judgment by which we shall be tried. It will be a vain thing then to pretend to numbers. Will those numbers be able to defend us? Can they guard us from the stroke of divine judgment? Will those trembling multitudes be able to interpose betwixt us and incensed justice, when none of them can save their own souls? It will be in vain then for men to throw their crimes one upon another, when they shall not be able to produce any strong reason or argument to do themselves any kindness. We shall then find it will be of consequence to have followed Christ, tho in a wilderness, in a state of solitude, tho in

ⁱ Rev. 6. 16.| ^k Luke 12. 32.

the company but of a few ; to have conducted ourselves by the rule of God's word, and not to have submitted our consciences to the government of men.

But I think the absurdity of this notion of *following the multitude to do evil*, is sufficiently exposed. I do not doubt but every one sees that it is a very unreasonable thing. But the great difficulty is, for men to lay up such a truth in their hearts ; to keep it in their minds ; to make use of it upon all occasions, so as not to suffer themselves to be abused by the specious pretences of others. And now,

IV. Let me close what I have said by making a few reflections.

1. Methinks it gives us a lamentable view of mankind. What corruption, what degeneracy, what folly hath sin brought upon the world ? He who is wise, would rather be under the conduct of one wise man than under the direction of a million of fools. The generality of the world are so foolish, that they are not fit to guide one another. And what an unsafe thing must it be then for men to *follow the multitude* ? How degenerate a creature is man ? He *hath corrupted his way* ; and yet he sees it so little, that he puts himself under the blind conduct of his neighbours, who are as corrupt and degenerate as himself.

2. This

2. This shews us what a great advantage it is to have the word of God for our direction. Let us *make God's testimonies our counsellors*¹; let us *account his law the truth*^m, and *hate every false way*ⁿ. When we *behold the transgressors*, let us *be grieved*; and by no means be prevailed on to imitate them, but make the word of God the constant guide of our thoughts and actions. This is the best way of shewing our thankfulness to the Almighty for this great advantage he hath given us.

3. Let us be ashamed wherein we have prevaricated in this matter, and gone contrary to the word of God. Let us examine ourselves impartially, whether we have not endeavoured to satisfy ourselves from the dictates of men, rather than from the word of God? Have we not trusted too much to great men, and to good men? If we have received truth itself, how came we by it? We ought to have sought the truth where it was to be found; and not to have taken it upon a presumption that it was in the multitude. Some people may hold right notions, tho from wrong principles: yet they sin against God; because they are not satisfied from grounds of reason, and the testimony of scripture, but from the multitude whence they take them.

¹ Psal. 119. 24.

^m Ver. 142.

ⁿ Ver. 128.

4. Let me therefore exhort you all to keep this in remembrance, *not to follow the multitude to do evil*. It ought to be a comfort to those who love truth in its simplicity, in a reflection upon their conduct, to find that they have valued it above all the world ; and that tho it hath exposed them to reproach, and many inconveniences, yet they have loved the truth, and sought it where it was to be found ; and have begged of God that he would *lead them in the paths of truth and righteousness, for his own name-sake* : that he would *remove from them the way of lying, and grant them his law graciously* ^p.

Let such noble and generous souls, who are free from the fordid and base designs of the world rejoice, that that truth which they have espoused is more valuable than all the world. *Buy the truth*, says the wise man, *and sell it not* ^q. *For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver ; and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is more precious than rubies : and all things we can desire, are not to be compared with it* ^r. We ought therefore to *buy the truth* at any rate, and to *sell it* for no consideration whatever. It behoves us therefore to value it, to prize it, and to continue the same diligence in the investigation of truth for the future. It behoves us to have a care of vain conceit, and of being too positive of our own opinions and practices ;

^p Psal. 119. 29.

^q Prov. 23. 23.

^r Prov. 3. 14, 15.

and to make it our chief concern that we may be able to *render a reason of the hope that is in us*¹. Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all God's commands², and have learned to *hate every false way*³. Truth is abundantly more valuable than all things that can be compared with it; and then certainly it is infinitely to be preferred to error: and therefore how numerous soever the multitudes may be who are on the side of error, that doth not change its nature, or lessen its evil. Let us then have that regard to truth, and righteousness, and holiness, which becomes us; going on diligently and industriously, searching after truth, diffident of ourselves; and examining our hearts and lives, whether we do all the duties prescribed us, and whether we make an advancement in our knowledge and spiritual stature, becoming the means allowed us. If we have received truth in any respect, let us not pride ourselves above others. And if it be a truth, which but few are apprized of; let us consider that God hath given us abundance of honour, in that he hath enlightened us. But let not this make us vain in our own conceit: let us not think that we are better than others, on the one hand; or, on the other, be tempted to abandon the truth we have received, because there are but few who profess it. If we are satisfied,

¹ 1 Pet. 3. 15.² Psal. 119. 6.

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³ Ver. 128.

upon good grounds, that what we profess is the truth; let us carry it with all becoming modesty in our conversation towards others, and endeavour, in the most compassionate manner, *to instruct the ignorant, and them that are out of the way*^u. And let us not think that we have already attained all that is attainable: but let us go on more and more towards perfection; that at last we may hear that joyful sound from our Lord Jesus Christ, *Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord*^v.

^u Heb. 5. 2.| ^v Mat. 25. 21.

S E R-

Vol. III



S E R M O N I V.

Keeping GOD'S COMMAND-
MENTS the true character
of our love to him.

Preach'd at

BARBICAN, November 28, 1708.

1 JOHN V. 3.

*For this is the love of God, that we keep
his commandments: and his command-
ments are not grievous.*



HO the beginning of this epistle
does not carry the name of the
apostle John; yet it hath not, I
think, in any time been doubted
whether it was written by him.
But it is supposed that he forbore to use the
common salutations at the beginning and end
of this epistle, and did not mention his name
or character as an apostle, as he does in the
succeeding epistles, because this was written for

the sake of those converted Jews, and other christians, who were scattered among the Parthians: who, not being subject to the Roman emperor, if there had been letters carried about, bearing the names of persons who lived under the Roman government, might have been liable to suspicion. It is therefore supposed that the apostle, to avoid all objections of that kind which might be made to the christians, wrote this epistle in such a manner, that it might pass as written by a nameless author. However, it breathes the same spirit, and is written in the same style that is to be observed in the other epistles of John, and in his gospel. In the writing of which gospel it is remarkable, that he takes special care to record those speeches of our Saviour which were most proper to excite in the minds of christians love to God, and to one another. And as this disciple had a special interest in the favour of Jesus Christ, was called the beloved disciple, and therefore did *lean upon his bosom* ^w, that is, sat next him at table, it being the custom of the ancients to lean one upon another as they sat at meat; so his mind was deeply enough impressed with that love which Christ manifested to him, to set him upon exhorting christians to make a return of ardent love to God and Christ, and to shew this by their affection to one another. Therefore it is a principal

^w John 13. 23.

part of his design, in this epistle, to excite the followers of Christ to mutual love and amity. He breathes here the same spirit as he does when he is recording in the gospel what our Saviour says upon this agreeable argument: so that tho his name is not in the epistle, yet the style shews sufficiently who was the penman of it.

It is supposed that it was written with a design to oppose the corrupt doctrines which were advanced among christians, after our Lord's ascension; which doctrines did abundance of mischief: that the apostle John was now very much advanced in years; and having seen what attacks were made by Satan and his emissaries against the christian doctrine, he wrote this epistle to fortify christians against the growing contagion. And we may observe that he speaks of some whom he calls *anticrists*, that is, enemies of Christ; of some who *did not confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God* *.

In the beginning of the epistle he speaks of the divinity of our Saviour, as well as towards the latter end of it; as it seems, in opposition to those who denied him to be the *Word of God*, that is, to be the second person in the Trinity. In this he seems to oppose the Ebionites, who early sprang up in the church, and denied his divinity; in the other the Basilidians, who denied his

* 1 John 2. 22. Chap. 4. 2, 3, 15. 5. 1, 5.

humanity. Then he speaks of some who pretended they were without sin : of whom the apostle says they were *liars* ; persons who pretended either to have arrived to such a perfection that they kept the law of God perfectly, or else imagined they were put into such a condition that no sin could defile them, or render them guilty.

It is evident he wrote against some who were very loose in their morals : who pretended to *know God*, to *walk in the light*, and *not to walk in darkness*, to *abide in God*, to *be born of him*, to *dwell in him*, and *be in them*^y ; who, while they affected such specious privileges as these were, and would appear in the world to be very intimate in their communion with God, yet did not walk becoming the gospel. Therefore the apostle makes it his business, in this epistle, to shew who are the persons that *walk in the light*, and *are born of God* ; tells us they are those who are holy ; that *those who are born of God, cannot sin* ; that *they love God, keep his commandments*, and *love the brethren*^z. He argues at length upon this ; and shews it is a vain thing to pretend to love God, unless we love the children of God, those who are truly christians. This is opposed to that hatred, envy, and malice, which occasion discord in the church of Christ. This is in general the scope of the apostle's design ;

^y 1 John 1. 6. Chap. 2. 9. |
Ver. 26, 29. Chap. 4. 7—11. |

^z 1 John 2. 7, 9, Chap. 3. 9.

to establish the doctrine of the christian religion, and to secure the minds of people from being corrupted with ill morals. And after he had discoursed of these marks and characters, of *being born of God, walking in him, &c.* and had shewn that it must appear by our *loving of him, and loving his people*; in the beginning of this chapter he says, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*: where he seems to reassume what he had been speaking of before. Whereas he had declared those who did not believe after this manner, to be antichrist; so he says, those who did believe, were *born of God*. The meaning is, *Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ*, believes this proposition, and walks correspondent to that belief, *is born of God*. It follows; *And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him*: i. e. as some interpret it, every one who loves God, loves Christ. And every one who loves God and Christ, loves the children of God; those who are begotten of him, true believers. Then it is added, *ver. 2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments*. As if he should say, do not mistake yourselves, that you love the children of God, because perhaps you love such to whom you are related according to the flesh; such, whose conversation is agreeable to you; such, the cultivation of whose friendship is profitable to you in your concerns. This is not enough:

but we know that we love them aright, when we love them for their Father's sake, when our love to them arises from religious principles ; because hereby it appears we keep the commandments of God : and if we love God, we shall keep the rest of the commandments, besides those which require us to love our fellow-christians. Then follow the words of our text : *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous.*

For this is the love of God ; that is, this is the fruit of our love to God, that we keep his commandments : herein it most evidently appears that we love God, if we keep his commandments.

And his commandments are not grievous. This is the doctrine which our Saviour himself preached : which this apostle took good notice of, and therefore recorded it in his gospel ; as you see in John 14. 14. where our Lord says, *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* As much as to say, if you love me sincerely, as you pretend to do, it will appear by your keeping my laws. And in the same chapter, ver. 23, 24. *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings : and the word which you hear, is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. If any man love me, he will keep my words ; and*
he

he that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings. And then in Chap. 15. ver. 14. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. You are then truly my friends; and I will acknowledge this to be a proof of your love. In the second epistle of John you find the apostle speaks after the same manner: ver. 6. *And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.* So that you see this was the doctrine inculcated by our Saviour, and John took it from him. He expresses himself in these several passages so fully to this purpose, that it must needs be very easy to understand his meaning; that God will not accept of any mens pretences of love, unless it appears by their observation of his commands. In the words of the text there are two things in general.

I. The character of true love to God. It will appear in *keeping his commandments.*

II. Here is either the amplification of this, in saying *his commandments are not grievous*; as much as to say, they are not grievous to them who love God: or else, here is the character of God's commandments in general, that they are not, in themselves, when duly and rightly considered, grievous or burdensom. According to the first sense, the apostle

2

shews

shews that it is not sufficient for a man to keep some of God's commandments, or to appear to keep his commandments only by abstaining from certain gross vices, or doing some good works; unless he does them with such a spirit and temper as is agreeable to love, such as shews that he loves God: that if he does them from a principle of love to God, then the divine commandments will not be grievous to him; he will *delight in the law of the Lord after the inner man*^a. According to the latter sense, it seems an answer to an objection. If it be said, *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*; it may be answered, but these commandments are very difficult and severe, and it is a very hard matter for the mind of a man to be brought to the observance of those precepts which are so very strict: the apostle takes off this objection, in shewing that *the commands of God are not grievous*. We are to consider,

I. The character of true love to God. It appears in *keeping his commandments*. And here I shall,

1. Consider what is signified by *the love of God*.

^a Rom. 7. 22.

2. What

2. What by *keeping his commandments*. And

th³ 3. Endeavour to prove to you, that this is a certain sign of our *love to God*, if we *keep his commandments*; and that it is impossible that we should truly love God, if we do not truly observe them.

1. We are to consider what is signified here by *the love of God*. Every one perceives that *love of God* here signifies love to God; as *the faith of Christ*^b sometimes signifies faith in Christ. But love is that affection of the mind by which we have respect unto some object that is capable of giving us pleasure; and our reflecting therefore upon this, produces that in our minds which is called love. But as there are various actions of the soul about this, it is necessary to consider it a little more narrowly, that we may shew that the love of God cannot be proved to be in any man, unless he keeps his commandments.

Sometimes our value and esteem of a person, or thing, is called love. So the psalmist speaks of his *loving the law of God*^c, because he had a high respect and value for it. And so we may be said to love persons with whom we are conversant, because we have a high esteem of their learning, knowledge, virtues, and agreeable temper.

^b Gal. 2. 20.

1 ^c Psal. 119. 97.

Again :

Again : it signifies desire of communion, or conversation ; the desire of the enjoyment of the object we love. So *the love of money*^d, signifies the earnest desire of amassing much riches together. And *the love of the world*^e, signifies the desire of procuring great temporal advantages ; an earnest and solicitous desire. Thus a man is said to love happiness when he desires it, tho at present it may be he is miserable.

Farther : sometimes love signifies a due complacential reflection, which we make upon what we do at present enjoy, or what we have before enjoyed. So we find that love is sometimes understood in the holy scripture. Thus the psalmist speaks of his *loving the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwells*^f ; to signify thereby his love to God, because he had tasted there how grateful it was to have communion with God, which excited his affections. And this complacential view, or reflection of the mind, is called love. Thus the parent is said to love his children when he considers their welfare and good, so as to take delight and pleasure in what they at present enjoy ; he is pleased with the consideration of their welfare. This is a complacential love.

There is also another kind of love, which consists in our desires to make some returns to the object beloved. And this may be

^d 1 Tim. 6. 10.

^e 1 John 2. 15.

| ^f Psal. 26. 8.

partly upon our own account : that we may continue to ourselves the friendship of a man, we are willing to make returns to him who hath expressed kindness to us. And it may be partly from a sense of an obligation to gratitude, and the conviction of the fitness of the thing in its own nature, that kindness should be shewn to those who shew kindness to us ; and that we should do that which is pleasing and agreeable to them.

Now to bring this matter to the subject in hand :

(1.) *The love of God*, or our love to God, signifies our high value and esteem of him, our high value and esteem of his perfections : for while we consider seriously, and reason justly ; while we behold that which is in itself excellent and orderly, it affords an agreeable thought and reflection in our minds. For as man was made for knowledge, made a rational creature ; he is capable, on many occasions, of discerning where beauty and order is, where there is something amiable and excellent in itself : and while he reflects upon this, and the justness of his own reasonings about it, he cannot choose but be pleased with his thoughts. We cannot, I say, choose but be pleased, when we think justly and reasonably, and when we desire any thing that is excellent in itself. So that a high value for God, on the account of his perfections, may be termed love to him ; or, as in our text, *the love of him*.

(2.) It

(2.) It also signifies our desire of union with God ; our desire to participate of those blessings he is capable of bestowing ; our desire of conversation and communion with him. For if we are made sensible that he hath perfections in himself, which are amiable, and that he is capable of making his creatures happy ; then *to love God*, is to desire to be made happy by the communication of those blessings which he is able to bestow upon us. So the spouse in Solomon's Song says, *she is sick of love* ^s : that is, her desire is very importunate and solicitous to have communion with Jesus Christ. There is an uneasiness attends the mind in love, while it is filled with desire after the object beloved, and that object is not enjoyed. If we desire the conversation and amity of a friend, who has, on some occasion or other, withdrawn the significations of his former kindness and favour from us ; there is an uneasiness in that importunate desire. However, this is called *love* : for this uneasiness is caus'd from the want of the enjoyment of that pleasure which is attainable from the object beloved.

(3.) *To love God* also signifies to take pleasure in the enjoyment of God, in the enjoyment of communion with him : that is, to take pleasure in the notices we have of him ; to take pleasure in the participation of those

^s Cant. 2. 5.

graces and virtues which make us conformable to him ; to take pleasure in those promises and assurances which he has given us, of farther instances of his favour and kindness ; to have a joyful reflection in our minds upon the account of the good and proper situation of our souls, while we have the great privileges and advantages of the favour of God, which contain all those blessings which are proper to be bestowed upon us. A reflection upon what we either have enjoyed, or do at present enjoy ; this creates a complacency in our minds, makes us take pleasure in God, and delight ourselves in him. As the psalmist speaks, *Delight thyself in the Lord*^h. And so the love of God is express'd to us, in his *delighting*ⁱ, and *rejoicing*^k, in his people. But then,

(4.) Our *love to God* signifies our desire of doing that which is pleasing and agreeable to him. When we love men with a love of kindness, it is called a love of benevolence : that is, we wish them well, and desire to do them good offices, and oblige them what we can. But God is infinitely above what we can do for him ; *Our goodness extends not to him*^l : he hath infinite happiness in himself, as he is all-sufficient. But to speak after the manner of men ; we may do things which are well-pleasing to God, which he takes as grateful returns for the love and goodness

^h Psal. 37. 4.

ⁱ Num. 14. 8.

^k Deut. 28. 63.

^l Psal. 16. 2.

he bestows on us. In this our love is operative. And this is the common acceptation of our *love of God*; when the thought of pleasing him is agreeable to us. And indeed when we truly love any object, any man whom we take for our friend; it must certainly be a great pleasure to us to do any thing that is acceptable to him. Now God is pleased to express himself after this manner: that he *delights in the righteous*^m; that *their services are acceptable to him*; and that *he smells a sweet savour in their sacrifices*ⁿ. Not that we can add any pleasure to him who enjoys infinite happiness in himself: but hereby is signified to us, that these things are as agreeable to the will of God, as when we do good offices to men we are said to be pleasing to them.

Speaking after the manner of men, therefore, this is *the love of God*: highly to value and esteem him; to desire the enjoyment of him by the communication of his grace and glory, and by the comforts of his free spirit; to take complacency and delight in the review of that communion we have had with God; to reflect with delight upon what we at present do enjoy of him; and to have an earnest and importunate desire to please him, to do that which is agreeable to him.

^m Jer. 9. 24.

I ⁿ Phil. 4. 18.

2. We are to consider what it is to *keep his commandments*. And this is so plain, that it needs not to be insisted on. To *keep the commandments of God*, is to *do them*°. When God gave his law to Israel of old, there were very solemn and repeated charges given them that they should *keep the law*^p, as it was written, very safe. The two tables were laid up in the holy of holies^q; and the people were ordered to *keep them in their houses; to write them upon the posts of their houses, and upon their gates; and to bind them for a sign upon their heads, and place them as frontlets between their eyes*^r; and all this to signify of how great importance it was to have a constant regard to the commands of God. They were to *speake of them when they sat in their houses, when they walked by the way, when they lay down, and when they rose up; they were to teach them their children and servants, &c.* So that to *keep God's commandments* is, in the constant tenor of our lives, to have a regard to his laws; to observe them ourselves, and promote holiness and purity among others, as much as possibly we can.

To *keep the commands of God*, is to make it our business constantly to *do his will* in all the instances of it, which may be presented to us; in all relations, and every circumstance of life; to be pious towards God; to

° Deut 4. 6. Ch. 5. 29—ult. |

^q Deut. 10. 2.

^p Exod. 25. 16. & Ver. 21. |

^r Chap. 6. 1—9.

be just and charitable towards men ; to be sober, humble, modest, temperate, and meek ; so to govern our passions within, and so to conduct ourselves in the manner of our lives, that we may do nothing contrary to the will of God. I proceed therefore,

3. To shew you how it appears that *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments* ; that the *keeping the commandments of God*, is a certain sign and demonstration of our love to him. And indeed the phrase imports that there is no loving of God unless we will do his will ; unless we will keep his commandments. I do not mean that we must perfectly keep the laws of God ; for there is *no man lives and sins not* ^f : but this must be the disposition of our minds, and tenor of our lives. And if we take but a short review of what I have said concerning *the love of God* ; it will soon appear to be a demonstration that we must *keep his commandments, if we love him*. For,

(1.) According to that notion of love, which signifies a high value and esteem of God ; if we value him upon the account of his perfections, it is certain we shall have a due regard to his commands : if we highly value his perfections, whether those we call natural or moral, as they all shew forth his glory ; it must certainly dispose us to conform to the will of that Being who is so

^f Eccles. 7. 20.

glorious and excellent in himself. If we, in any proper manner, admire him for his power and authority over us ; then we shall shew our regard to his authority, by being obedient to his commands. If we value his wisdom ; then we shall value his laws, which bear such characters of wisdom upon them. If we value his holiness ; we cannot but value his laws, wherein this perfection so conspicuously appears. And so if we have a true value for the goodness of God ; we cannot but be naturally engag'd from thence to obey him. His laws are spiritual, *holy, just, and good*^s ; and therefore they must needs be valued by us, if we have regard to these perfections of the divine nature, and have such a veneration for them as becomes us. Can a man pretend sincerely to love God, and not to love his laws ? To love those perfections, which he who believes there is a God must own to be in him, and at the same time refuse subjection to his precepts, is a gross contradiction. Can we have a due esteem for his holiness, justice, and goodness, and yet violate his laws ? 'Tis certain we cannot. For, to do that, is to say that he is not wise who hath given us those laws : for if they are wise institutions, why should we not obey them ? Or that he is not just : for if there is nothing in them but what is just and reasonable, why should they not be

^s Rom. 7. 12.

observed? Or that he is not good and merciful in giving such precepts: for if his goodness and mercy appear in the laws he hath enjoin'd, why do we not observe them? And certainly the goodness of God, as well as his righteousness and wisdom, appears in his laws, in a great many instances: nay, in all of them, in regard to the end to which they point; for our due observance of them, is to be rewarded with eternal happiness.

Therefore you see it is inconsistent with loving of God, for us to violate and break those laws which he hath given us; I mean, to live in such a course of life as is opposite to the divine commands. If we love God, we shall love his resemblance; and there is a glorious resemblance of him in his divine precepts. He who has a true love for God, delights in every discovery of the divine perfections which is presented to his view: he sees they are truly amiable and lovely, and therefore has a becoming value for them: he loves to survey the works of God, and to inquire into the effects of his power and providence; because they bear the character of their great author. And thus also he who loves God, and admires his perfections, will see the glory of them shine in the perfection of his holy law after such a manner, that he cannot choose but have a delight in those commands; and, to be sure, he will then make it his business to observe them.

(2.) If

(2.) If you consider this love with respect to union, and a desire of communion and conversation with God, a desire to be united to him, to enjoy him, to have our minds filled with the knowledge of God, to be made to resemble him, to be rendred capable of being happy in the enjoyment of him both here in the state of grace, and hereafter in the state of glory ; if we so love God, it will appear by our *keeping his commands* : for keeping the commands of God, is the means of our enjoying that communion with him of which we are speaking. As he converses with us by his word, so do we converse with him thereby. This is the true way to have communion with him : for he hath promised he *will be near to those who thus seek him* ; and that he *will reward those who observe his righteous precepts*. *I love them*, says he, *that love me* ; and *those that seek me early shall find me* ^t. And to the same purpose our Saviour speaks to his disciples : *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever* ^u. *Keep my commandments* ; and *I will pray the Father for you* : you shall have joy in your minds, you shall have peace in your consciences, the joy of the Holy Spirit ; you shall maintain sweet and continued communion with God, *if you love him, and keep his commandments*. Again, in the same chapter : *Jesus said, If*

^t Prov. 8. 17.^u John 14. 15, 16.

a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him ; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him ^v. *If any man love me, he will keep my words. And what will be the consequence of this ? My Father will love him, &c.* It must be acknowledged indeed, the love of God preceeds our love to him ; that love which we call the love of good-will to him. And as *Christ loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood* ^w ; so the Father's sending his Son into the world on this gracious errand, was the effect of his love. And it is by this love that the first grace is planted in our souls. But then, as the love of good-will prevents all our love to him, that is, goes before it ; for *herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us* ^x ; and *we love him, because he first loved us* ^y : so it is the love of complacency which is afterwards shewn ; *I love them that love me.* So here : *I and my Father will love him, and will come to him, and make our abode with him. We will manifest ourselves to him : as our Saviour expresses himself a little before. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me : and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father ; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him* ^z. God will manifest himself to us by

^v John 14. 23.

^w Rev. 3. 5.

^x 1 John 4. 19.

^y Ver. 19.

^z John 14. 21.

divine truths, which he will communicate to our minds: he *will take up his abode* with us by the operations of his Holy Spirit: he *will dwell* in us by his free spirit, as a comforter to cheer and revive our souls. So that if we love God truly, so as to desire the enjoyment of him, that pleasure which is to be found in communion with him; then it is certain we shall *keep his commandments*; because this is the way and the means which he hath established in order to obtain these most valuable ends. As this, I say, is ordained by God as the means and way of our enjoyment of him; so if we earnestly desire the end, it will appear by our using the proper means. It is thus in the nature of the thing itself: for *how can two walk together, except they be agreed*^a? Is there *any communion betwixt Christ and Belial*^b? Is there any communion betwixt God and one who goes on in a course of vice? Or can any such thing be? How can one love God so as to desire communion with him, and at the same time do that which is utterly inconsistent in its own nature with that communion? How can there be communion where there is no resemblance, no likeness? Therefore, in the nature of the thing, there cannot be any enjoyment of God, or sincere desire after it; there cannot be in us any love to God, properly speaking, unless we keep his

^a Amos 3. 3.| ^b 2 Cor. 6. 15.

commandments. For, to say we love a thing, and do all we can to render ourselves incapable of enjoying it, is the greatest absurdity that can be.

(3.) As love signifies that delight and complacency which we actually take in reflecting upon what we love ; it is evident we cannot love God, if we do not keep his commandments. With what pleasure can we reflect upon the communion we have had with him, if we have not a delight in his commandments ? If indeed it were possible for us to have had communion with God, without being conformable to his will ; something might be said for this. But seeing it is impossible to have communion with him without likeness and assimilation to him ; and seeing God will never grant us the enjoyment of this blessing unless we observe his laws ; it is impossible we can take any complacency and delight in him without this supposition. As for the wicked, when they view the perfections of the Almighty, when they behold that he is a just and a holy God ; this, instead of giving them joy and satisfaction, fills them with sorrow and trouble. Therefore they do not desire to have any communion with him, or any knowledge of his perfections : *God is not in all their thoughts*^c. Then, as to having communion with God in the way he hath prescribed ; they say to the Almighty, *Depart from us, for we desire not*

^c Psal. 10. 4.

the knowledge of thy ways^d. They can take no complacency in that to which they are utterly averse : nor can they make any pleasant reflection upon these things, while their minds are in a state of enmity to God, *while they are enemies to him thro' wicked works*^e.

(4.) It appears also plain, that those who love God, must needs keep his commandments, in that sense wherein love to God signifies the desire to do that which is conformable to his will, and agreeable to him. For is it possible that those who love God, and make this their pleasure and their happiness, to enjoy communion with him ; is it possible that these should have no grateful thoughts, and that they shall forbear to consider what they shall render to him for all his benefits^f ? Is any thing more natural than for love to attract love ; or that the kindness which God manifests towards us, should engage us to consider what we shall do for him ? Now seeing he is above wanting any thing from us, and *our goodness cannot extend to him*^g ; the studious and grateful soul will, however, consider what is pleasing and agreeable to him. And nothing certainly can be so agreeable to God as his own glorious likeness : therefore that which nearest resembles him must be most beloved by him. His Son, who is *the brightness of his glory*,

^d Job 21. 14.

^e Col. 1. 24.

^f Psal. 116. 12.

^g Psal. 16. 2.

and

and the express image of his person^h, is infinitely beloved by him, because he is infinitely lovely, having the same perfections. And so amongst men; those must needs be most beloved by him with a complacential love, who are most conformed to his image.

He who loves God, and desires to be happy with him, must necessarily thus express his love by keeping his commandments after the best manner he can; and that not only out of gratitude, but likewise on the account of his own interest. For if we know what is well-pleasing to God, we know what is agreeable to him will be rewarded by him; and the thought of a reward for our love, will always prove a strong motive to increase it. And thus interest, as well as gratitude and duty, oblige us to love God, and keep his commandments: there is nothing wherein we can imitate God so much, nothing that can be so grateful and acceptable to him. Therefore our services are called *acceptable services*; *incense*, and *sacrifices of a sweet savour*ⁱ, when they are performed aright; to shew that as they are conformable to God's will, so they will be return'd upon us with unspeakable blessings.

Thus have I plainly prov'd to you, that on whatsoever side we view this matter; however we consider the notion of love, as it signifies an esteem and value of God; as it

^h Heb. 1. 3.

| ⁱ Rom. 12. 1. Eph. 5. 10.

signifies a desire of intimate communion with him ; as it signifies a complacency, or a reflection upon that pleasure which we have enjoyed, or do enjoy in communion with him ; or as it signifies a desire to please him, and do that which is acceptable to him : this *love*, which way soever we take it, must needs appear in *keeping God's commandments* ; and without keeping his commandments, it can by no means appear at all : but, on the contrary, it appears that we do not love God, nor please him ; that we do not value and esteem him as we ought to do ; that we do not seek our own happiness in the enjoyment of him ; that we cannot take complacency in him, and in his perfections ; and that we cannot truly desire, and endeavour to please him : all this, I say, appears, if we do not keep his commandments. *Ye that love the Lord hate evil*^k, says the psalmist : and, *If you love me, keep my commandments*^l, says our Saviour. And, *this is the love of God*, says our apostle, *that we keep his commandments*. But,

II. The other thing contained in the text deserves consideration : *His commandments are not grievous*.

If we take this in the first sense, that *his commandments are not grievous to them that love him* ; the thing itself is plain and evi-

^k Psal. 97. 10.

| ^l John 14. 15.

dent, and likewise shews the excellent temper of the minds of those who love God. They take pleasure and delight in his commandments. When they serve him, it is not with the obedience of slaves, merely because they are afraid of some punishment that will befall them; nor merely on the account of God's seeing them, and because to him they must be accountable: but they obey him out of pleasure, because they are convinced of the reasonableness and excellency of his precepts; because they are studious to make some grateful returns to his favour; because they know they consult their own happiness, as well as perform their duty, in keeping his commands. It cannot be grievous to them; for love makes every thing easy. Love makes us take pleasure in doing things which are difficult in themselves, if it be to oblige a friend, for whom we have a value and esteem: and especially if our friend has laid any considerable obligations upon us; we embrace heartily the opportunity, because there is an uneasiness in our minds till we have an opportunity to express our love and gratitude to those to whom we are obliged. And if this be carried so far amongst men, that sometimes they will even *lay down their lives for them whom they dearly love*; that for a friend *a man will even dare to die*^m; certainly those who love God, those

^m Rom. 5. 7.

who have grateful and generous thoughts becoming christians, who have a true sense of the divine love, they can think nothing too much to do for him, nor any thing too hard to suffer for him who has done so much for them. If there be any of God's commandments grievous, it must be that which obliges us to self-denial and suffering for the sake of religion. And the trouble and burden even of this command which seems so severe, is, in a great measure, taken off from those persons who love God. Love renders their service easy; and makes them take pleasure in mortifying their sins, and in suffering for the sake of religion. From this principle the apostle rejoiced in his bonds, and in his tribulation; and was willing to *fill up what was behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for his body's sake, which is the church*ⁿ. And to so high a degree hath this temper of mind risen in many of the martyrs of Christ, that they have seemed to be insensible of their pains and torments; their minds were so strictly applied to their duty, and so much filled with the love of God. They knew it to be so noble and excellent a thing to do what God requires, that they have thought they could not suffer too much for the sake of him who had done so much for them. This made one of them complain that he had no more lives to lay down for Jesus Christ.

ⁿ Col. i. 24.

As it thus appears, that *the commandments of God are not grievous to them that love him* ; so if we consider this expression in the other sense : if we consider it as the character of the divine commands in general, that they *are not grievous* ; this will also very evidently appear. It may justly be said so of them, in a comparative sense ; and it may be said so of them considered absolutely, in their own nature.

1. Comparatively : they are *not grievous*. If we compare the laws of God, the severest of them, with those bonds and yokes which are imposed on us by sin and Satan, and by the men of this world ; we shall find that these are hard task-masters, but that it is very unreasonable to call God an austere master. What a terrible slavery is it for a man to be hurried by the violence of his own passions, and of his own appetites, which are ever pressing and importunate, and can never be satisfied with the things of this world ? to be always perplexed with *vanity, and vexation of spirit* ; and yet always to perform over again the same things, endure the same toil, and the same labour, only to attain the same end ? for persons to have the most ardent desires after happiness ; and yet to be so foolish as to imagine they shall attain it by earthly enjoyments, and, notwithstanding the many convictions and disappointments they meet with, still to run the same round of folly over and over again ? Is it not

a wretched slavery for men *to be led captive by the devil at his will* °; to be hurried by their own passions, like the poor man who continually ran among the tombs; who was not only unfit to converse with others, but exercised cruelty and violence upon himself, cutting his body with stones, and could not be tamed by any man ^p? This is the madness and folly of the minds of men, when subject to the government of Satan, or the dominion of their own lusts. But surely it is far otherwise with the divine commands. There is nothing in them that makes such disturbance in the minds of men; nothing but what allays and qualifies the passions, and brings them into rectitude and order. And there are other considerations besides, which will shew that these *are not grievous*, comparatively speaking. Tho there be some self-denial in religion, some trouble and pains, some difficulty to *enter in at the strait gate* ^q; tho the *cutting off right hands*, and *plucking out right eyes* ^r, which the commands of God require, carries in them something which looks severe; yet these seem more grievous at first than they will appear afterwards. And they *are not grievous*, in comparison of the slavery and servitude in which people must be, while they attend to the voice of Satan, and are *led captive* by their own vile affections, while they become *the servants*

° 2 Tim. 2. 26.

² Mark 5.

^q Mat. 7. 14.

^r Chap. 5. 29, 30.

of men, accompany them in their crimes, their absurdities and follies, favour them in their vices, and serve them in their sins, and suffer themselves to be infected by their evil examples. This is indeed very grievous : but the commands of God are not so, when compared with these task-masters.

Moreover : under the dispensation of the gospel, in a special manner, *the commands of God are not grievous*, in this comparative sense. The ceremonies of the law, tho agreeable to that œconomy, were very burdensom : but that burden is taken off from us ; and therefore, comparatively speaking, on that account, under the christian œconomy, the divine commands are not grievous ; seeing, under this dispensation, God hath been pleased to give us but few ordinances and institutions, and the greatest part of our duty consists in the performance of moral precepts. But then,

2. Absolutely speaking, *the commands of God are not grievous* in themselves : that is, they are not grievous to those who have a right apprehension of them ; who are in a proper temper of mind to consider their nature and intention. They are grievous indeed to many ; but then it is not because of any fault in the divine commands, but in the persons themselves who refuse obedience to them. If a man have his shoulder put out of joint, a small thing may appear very burdensome to him ; which would not be so,
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in case the bone was in its proper place. So while men are in a state of sin and corruption, abandoned to vice and folly; while they are yet unregenerate, their minds are so disordered, that the commands of God are burdensome to them. But they are not so in themselves: they are not so to them who reason rightly about things. In their view there is nothing in the divine law but what is spiritual, holy, just, and good; nothing but what is adapted to the various circumstances and conditions of life; nothing but what is suited to the relation we bear to God and to men, to societies and to particular persons, and the regard we ought to have to ourselves: for the law of God is so far from being grievous, or prejudicial to our private interests, that it obliges us to take the best and most diligent care both of our souls and bodies.

So that consider God's commands in themselves, and there is nothing more reasonable. And this, if there were time, might be made appear to you in various instances. Can any thing be more reasonable and just, than that we should serve the God who made us; and resign ourselves to the providence of him who is infinitely wise, gracious and merciful? Is there any thing more reasonable than that we should rather expose ourselves to suffering than to sin, and *obey God rather than men*? Is it not fit that we should *serve, and worship him alone who is the only true God*;

and that we should worship him in the manner he hath prescribed? Is it not fit that we should behave ourselves with humility, who are such poor inconsiderable creatures? Is it not reasonable that we should be meek, and that we should govern our passions with moderation? Is it not reasonable that we should carry it with great tenderness and compassion towards those who are in distress and misery, and *do to others as we would have others do to us*? Is it not fit that these bodies of ours should be so governed as to be rendered serviceable to our more noble part, our souls? Is it not fit that the faculties of our minds should be employed about those things whereby God may be glorified, and our own true interest advanced; and likewise the common interest of mankind? Is it not fit that we should bestow our love upon those things which are truly amiable in themselves? Is it not fit that we should believe him, who *is truth itself*? Is it not fit that we should follow his dictates, who prescribes nothing but what is proper, and convenient for us to submit to?

What is there therefore in the commands of God that appears grievous to us? If because of some circumstances they seem to be so; because of the reluctancy of our corrupt natures to them, because in our obedience to them we may be exposed to various afflictions and persecutions; yet, I say, it does not appear that the commands of God
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are really rendred grievous, by these things : for God has taken sufficient care to fortify us against these evils ; and to make us acknowledge, that *his yoke is easy, and his burden is light* ^f. For if we suffer for our obedience to the commands of God, he hath promised to support us under those sufferings ; and to reward us not only with communion and fellowship with him while we are here, but with eternal life hereafter. A reward which so greatly exceeds all the sufferings which can possibly attend our obedience to the commands of God, that it may be well said of them that they are but *light, and for a moment ; and not worthy to be compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which God hath promised us* ^g. If we find a reluctancy in nature ; if tho' *the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak* ; he hath promised us the advantages of his free spirit : *Ask, and you shall have* ^h. He will console our souls *with joy unspeakable, and full of glory* ⁱ. We shall have, in the time of our obedience, the assistance and the comforts of God's free Spirit, to help us thro' all our difficulties ; *the joy of a good conscience, and that peace of God which passes all understanding* ^j. And if there be difficulty in religion, it is commonly at first : and this will appear less and less still, as we go on and make a pro-

^f Mat. 11. 30.

^g 2 Cor. 4. 17.

^h John 14. 13—16.

ⁱ 1 Pet. 1. 8.

^j Phil. 4. 7.

gress. The more we deny ourselves, the more easy it will be ; and we shall have the greater joy. And therefore if we have communion with God at present, and the prospect of everlasting happiness ; if we have experience of his assistance and comfort in our present difficulties, and assurance in his promises that he will assist and support us in all our future trials and afflictions ; it may well be said that *his commandments are not grievous*.

But to conclude. As *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous* ; it behoves us to examine ourselves upon this topick, whether we love God, and keep his commandments, or not ? Do we keep them ? Do we make it the business of our lives, and is it our pleasure, to do that which is agreeable to him ? Do we *delight in the law of the Lord after the inner man* * ? Do we study what is *his good, and acceptable, and perfect will* * ? Have we a tenderness of conscience, that we will not do what may probably offend him, tho we are not certain of it ? Do we delight in reading his law, in *meditating upon it* ; and make it the rule of our lives ? If we love God, certainly it appears by our keeping his commandments. Some indeed are ready to suspect themselves that they do

* Rom. 7. 22.

| * Chap. 12. 2.

not love God; because they know it is their duty to perform the divine commands, but in many instances they fail in it. But what is the settled resolution of your mind; what is it you most aspire after? Is it your trouble, that you do not keep the commandments of God as you ought to do? Do you seriously mourn over the violation of his law, when you are surprized into sin? Your love appears in this sorrow, and this trouble: for those who mourn over their non-conformity to the divine law, *love the law of the Lord, and delight in it after the inner man*^y; provided this be a serious sorrow, and a true repentance. Are you therefore uneasy that you love the law of God no more? Are you ashamed of your follies, and sinful inadvertencies? Do you make it the business of your lives to reform; and do you desire nothing more ardently than this: and is it your greatest solicitude that you may be holy, as well as happy? Do you love communion with God, that it may bring you into a conformity to him; that you may know him better, and love him more? Do you value his ordinances for this end? Then it is a sign you love God. But whatever enjoyments you profess to have, or whatsoever ease in your own minds on the account of the orthodoxy of your principles, and the goodness of your faith; if that faith hath

^y Rom. 7. 22.

not wrought by this love which appears in keeping the commandments of God, it is not genuine. And from henceforth, seeing *the commandments of God are not grievous*, as you find they are not, when compared with the yoke of sin and Satan; seeing they are not grievous to a good man, but, notwithstanding there is some remaining reluctancy, yet he is enabled by the grace of God to overcome it; and seeing they are not grievous when we consider them in themselves, and according to the rule of right reason: how inexcusable is the folly of those who will not submit themselves to the divine commands? How inexcusable will these be at the last judgment; when all shall acknowledge this truth, that the divine *commands are not grievous*? How inexcusable shall they be, who pretend Christ was an austere master; when it will evidently appear to the contrary? How great will be their shame and confusion, as well as their pain and misery? And what encouragement should this be to us all to give up ourselves intirely to God; and to shew our love to him by keeping of his commandments? Many are for defering the business of religion, because they imagine it to be troublesome and difficult: tho they would be glad to escape the wrath of God, and be intitled to his favour; yet they would stay a little longer, before they would enter upon this difficult task. Let such consider what hath
been

been said upon this account, and be engaged, without delay, to enter upon the business of religion : and they will find, that as *in keeping the commandments of God there is great reward* ² ; *so all his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are paths of peace* ³.

² Psal. 19. 11.

³ Prov. 3. 17.





S E R M O N V.

The righteousness of the
Scribes and Pharisees con-
sidered.

Preach'd at

PINNERS-HALL, April 28, 1705.

MATT. V. 20.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The first S E R M O N on this text.



WE have two discourses of our blessed Saviour given us more largely than any other in the sacred writings. The one was this sermon pronounced upon the mount; recorded in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of this gospel by Matthew.
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The other was a discourse which our Lord entertained his disciples with a little before his sufferings; contained in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of the gospel of John. You may well suppose he at other times preached to the same purpose, and perhaps was as large in his discourses: but the matter contained in these two sermons, is especially preserved to us by the penmen of the gospel; and so ordered by the Spirit of God, who brought these truths to their remembrance, because they were of most special concern unto the church of God in all ages. The discourse, of which our text is a part, seems to have been delivered presently after our Saviour's baptism, and entrance upon his publick ministry; as the other was delivered a little before he laid down his life upon the cross. This, it seems, was to initiate men in the christian religion, and to shew what great obligations were upon them who would become his disciples; as the other was to confirm them when they had engaged themselves in the profession of christianity, and had taken the yoke of Christ upon them. This sermon was preached soon after the baptism of our Lord, and seems to be especially designed to deliver the people from their evil prejudices; to recover them from those errors into which they had fallen by means of the false glosses of the Pharisees upon the law of God; and the degeneracy of the age that rendred the
people

people disposed to receive such loose kind of morals, and such traditions and superstitious practices as had no foundation in the divine law, but were contrary to it. As this discourse therefore consisted of an explication of the law ; so the other sermon, which our Saviour pronounced a little before his sufferings, contained an explication of the promises of the gospel with reference to the mission of the Spirit, and the great things which should be performed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by his followers ; of the glory of his second coming, and of his kingdom.

As for this sermon of which our text is a part, I shall only observe to you, besides what hath been said already, that our Saviour had begun it in pronouncing various blessings upon such as were truly pious, whose minds were adorned with christian virtues, and whose manners were agreeable thereunto. Those who were *poor in spirit*, who were *meek*, who *hungred and thirsted after righteousness*, who were *merciful*, who were *pure in heart*, who were *peace-makers*, and who *suffered for righteousness-sake* ^b ; those who were truly religious and virtuous, whatever it cost them, were the persons on whom our Saviour pronounced the blessing. And certainly these blessings were a very proper introduction to his ministry ; seeing

^b Mat. 5. 3—10.

it was his great work, the work on which he came into the world, to bless men. *God sent his Son Jesus to bless us, by turning away every one of us from our iniquities*^c. But it was not enough for our Saviour to shew that those who were truly religious should be truly blessed: but because men had false notions about religion, and made a multitude of mistakes concerning it, many fancying themselves truly religious, and intitled to those blessings, when they had no just grounds to form such conclusions in their own favour; therefore our Saviour explained the law of God, the moral law, and shewed the great obligations by which men are engaged to obedience and holiness: signifying, that without such a conformity to the divine law, there was no room for them to expect the blessings he had pronounced. And there was so much the more reason for our Lord to insist strictly upon this matter, because of the obscurity which was cast on God's holy law thro' the sad degeneracy of the Jewish church, and the fraud of their chief leaders; who pretending to teach the ignorant people knowledge, prov'd in reality but *blind leaders of the blind*^d. For the Scribes and Pharisees, who were great pretenders to religion, had made such interpretations of the law in favour of their own hypocrisy, as might persuade the people they

^c Acts 3. 26.| ^d Mat. 15. 14.

were in a certain way to happiness ; when, notwithstanding all their great boasts and pretences to piety and holiness, they were but as *painted sepulchres* °, as our Lord takes occasion elsewhere to tell them : they were outwardly gay and pompous, but inwardly full of filth and rottenness. He therefore shews what it is the law of God requires ; and how sincere, and strict, and circumspect men ought to be, if they will, in good earnest, aspire after true holiness. It is true, our Lord Jesus Christ does, in his discourses, abundantly shew, by his strict interpretation given of the law, that men have need of another righteousness than their own, for their justification in the sight of God. But he also shews, and that is indeed his main design in this chapter, that men are under the strictest obligations to holiness and purity, if they would enter into the kingdom of heaven. And he had, in the 16th verse of this chapter declared, that those who would be his disciples must not only be secretly religious, but must diffuse their light in the world, and spread it abroad by a holy conversation : *Let your light*, says he, *so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven*. Because our Lord came to set up a new religion in the world, came as an extraordinary prophet, and instructed the

° Mat. 23. 27.

people in a more excellent manner than the Scribes and Pharisees ; they, it seems, insinuated that he came to make void the moral law. Now this had been so far from advancing our Saviour's reputation, if it had been true, that it would have answered indeed the designs of the Pharisees, and effectually prejudiced the minds of the people against him. It had prejudiced all reasonable persons against his doctrine, if he had really come to dissolve the obligation men owe to the moral law : for this would have been to overthrow holiness at once. But our Lord sufficiently vindicates himself from this imputation. *Think not, says he, that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil^f : I am come to keep the law of God ; to obey it, and not to destroy it. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled^g. Not one jot or tittle : a jot is the least letter, and a tittle the least vowel in the Hebrew language. And thus our Saviour declares, that not the least point should be taken from the moral law : for it is of this that he is discoursing ; as is evident from the rest of the chapter. Till all be fulfilled : that is, but all shall be fulfilled ; it shall be obeyed, because it remains. In the same form are the words of the prophet, *This iniquity shall not be purged from you**

^f Mat. 5. 17.| ^g Ver. 18.

till ye die^h : that is, they shall never be taken away ; but ye shall die. So here ; *Till the law be fulfilled* : that is, but it shall be fulfilled. And as our Lord by this declares himself to be a zealous maintainer of the moral law ; so he takes occasion to warn men against the violation of it ; declaring, that whosoever should break it, would be very culpable. *Whosoever shall break the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*ⁱ. This seems, in a special manner, to reflect upon the Scribes and Pharisees, who made void some of the laws of God by their own traditions ; tho the words are general, and may be extended to any other, who, by their false interpretations and erroneous notions, go about to vacate the divine law. And then follow the words of our text : *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

q. d. “ Except you take other measures concerning the law of God than they have
 “ done, unless you understand the divine
 “ law in a different manner than they have
 “ explain’d it, and obey it at another manner of rate than they have prescribed ;

^h Isa. 22. 14.| ⁱ Mat. 5. 19.

“ unless

“ unless you act, and unless you teach the
 “ divine law after another manner, you
 “ shall not enter into the kingdom of God.”

Here, First, we may take notice of the form of our Saviour’s words ; and then of the matter of them.

First, As to the form of them ; it is observable that our Lord speaks with some emphasis, with some more than ordinary force, when he says, *For I say unto you.* Thus when he has something of very great importance to deliver, he frequently introduces it with, *Verily I say unto you ; or, Verily, verily I say unto you :* which is as much as to say, Observe what I speak ; I declare to you expressly. So here ; *I say unto you, unless a man’s righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* “ I say it, “ who know the truth, and am sent into “ the world to bear witness to the truth^k : “ I say it, who know what is necessary to “ bring men to the kingdom of heaven ; I, “ who know all the obligations to holiness “ and purity ; I, who know perfectly well “ all the requirements of the moral law, “ because I am the author of it ; I, who “ am that prophet sent of God^l, and know “ his will intirely ; *I say unto you, unless “ your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes “ and Pharisees, you cannot enter into the “ kingdom of God.*” There is a farther force

^k John 18. 17.

| ^l John 6. 14. Deut. 18. 15.
 given

given to the words in the Greek. Our translation renders it, *he shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God ; in no case :* in the Greek it is, *you shall not not*^m. Our Lord doubles the negative, to shew the impossibility of the thing, that a man should enter into the kingdom of heaven, if he had no better a righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

If therefore we consider the person who speaks, and the emphasis which he puts upon his own words, and with what seriousness and solemnity he professes the thing ; it may well put us,

Secondly, Upon an inquiry into the matter of the words, the substance of this doctrine of Christ ; what kind of righteousness this was of the Scribes and Pharisees, with which alone they could not be admitted into heaven : and what righteousness that must be which exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, without which a man cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. And in order to this, I therefore propose, from these words to shew you,

- I. What is meant by *the kingdom of heaven*.
- II. What kind of persons these Scribes and Pharisees were, who, it seems, had not a title to the kingdom of heaven.

^m & μὴ.

I

III. What

III. What kind of righteousness that was which they had, and which would not give them admittance into the kingdom of heaven.

IV. What kind of righteousness that is which is meant in the text, without which a man *cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*; and concerning which it is implied, that he who hath it shall enter into that kingdom.

V. How it appears that it is *impossible* for any one *to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, who hath not that righteousness which our Saviour speaks of; a *righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees.*

Our Saviour speaks of something here that is a great advantage, a great and glorious privilege, desired by the Scribes and Pharisees as well as others; namely, *to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* He supposes that it is necessary to have a certain righteousness to enter into this kingdom; that these Scribes and Pharisees had it not: and therefore he warns others, that their righteousness may exceed theirs; or else they will not be admitted into this glorious state, described by *the kingdom of heaven.* Therefore,

I. I am to shew you what it is our Saviour means by *the kingdom of heaven.*

The kingdom of heaven, in the scriptures of the New Testament, is variously accepted: sometimes it hath regard to the state of grāce, and sometimes to the state of glory.

If we interpret the words here to have relation to the state of grace; the meaning must not be, that those persons who have not a *righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, cannot enter into a church-state: for many hypocrites have entred into the church, and made a formal profession, and a considerable appearance in the eyes of the best men, a great appearance of religion; many have entred into the visible church of Christ, who had not that righteousness which is necessary for admission into the kingdom of heaven. If it be understood therefore of the state of grace; the meaning must be, that unless a man's *righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, he cannot be truly a member of the church of Christ; of that visible church which is vitally united to him as the head: cannot be a true member of Christ's mystical body. And this indeed is very true: to be a christian in reality, to be a true disciple of Christ, to be a member of his mystical body; a man must have a *righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees*.

But I rather think that *the kingdom of heaven* here relates to the state of glory. Because,

I. That

1. That is the proper signification of *the kingdom of heaven*: and the proper signification of words ought always to be taken, where there is nothing to determine us another way. The gospel church-state is called *the kingdom of heaven*; because it may be compared to the state of glory, grace being the beginning of glory, and those who are the members of Christ's church in a state of grace, having a title to glory; and because they are heavenly-minded, raised above this world, and the things and the inhabitants thereof, in regard of the purity of their affections, and in regard of their heavenly desires. They are raised above the things of this world, because they despise and condemn carnal things; having higher and nobler objects to entertain their minds, and after which they earnestly aspire. But seeing the most natural and proper sense of *the kingdom of heaven* is the state of glory; and seeing it is certainly true, that they who have not a *righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees, cannot enter into the state of glory*; and if they cannot be true members of Christ in a state of grace, by a much stronger reason they cannot be inhabitants of the kingdom of glory: therefore this sense I count preferable to the other.

2. Our Saviour had been speaking of the state of glory in the same terms before: and therefore we must take the expression in

the same sense here, unless there be some obvious reason to determine the contrary. Among the blessings and rewards he pronounces in the beginning of the chapter, he says, in the 3d verse, *blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; and in the 10th verse, *blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness-sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; and this he explains in the 12th verse; *rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven*. From these places, I think, it is sufficiently plain, that our Lord is here speaking of the state of glory: and therefore we have reason to understand his words in our text in the same sense. Besides,

3. This phrase, of *the kingdom of heaven*, or *the kingdom of God*, is most frequently used to this purpose in the scriptures of the New Testament. As in Mat. 7. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven*. So in Mat. 19. 23. our Lord shews, *how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*. By which seems to be signified the state of glory: because the generality of those who are rich, are so much intangled and insnared with the things of this world, that they mind not heavenly things after such a manner as is necessary to the attaining of everlasting life. So in Acts 14. 22. the apostles declare, that *thro' much tribulation*

we must enter into the kingdom of God : after we have suffered with Christ, we must reign with him. And in the same sense our Lord evidently uses the phrase, when he says ; except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of Godⁿ ; i.e. the kingdom of glory.

4. This seems to be plainly the sense of our text, because it is opposed to a state of torment in hell. In the words after the text, our Saviour speaks of *the danger of the judgment*, and of *the danger of the council* ; and of *the danger of hell-fire*°. And, as by these expressions, he is evidently threatening those who live in sin with future punishments ; so when, in order to encourage righteousness and obedience to the law of God, he here proposes the kingdom of heaven for a reward ; it is reasonable to suppose he intends the glorious state of the saints hereafter. And this will be farther illustrated, if we compare this text with the report given by the evangelist Mark, concerning some of the same things which are contained in the context. You see what our Saviour says in this 5th of Matthew, ver. 29. *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* Compare this with Mark 9. 47. and there you will

° John 3. 3.

1 ° Ver. 21, 22.

find it thus expressed : *If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out : it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire.* So that here our Lord opposes *the kingdom of heaven* to a state of torment in hell. This being therefore agreeable to the words in the context, there is reason to suppose he means here the state of glory.

So much may suffice for the first thing, what is signified by *entring into the kingdom of heaven* : it is entring into that state of glory in the other world, which is spoken of in scripture by so many elegant terms ; and where *Christ, our fore-runner, is entred* ^P,

II. We are to consider what kind of persons these *Scribes and Pharisees* were, who made such a pretence to *the kingdom of heaven* ; and yet, it seems, had no real title to it. The Scribes were certain officers among the Jews : and the Pharisees were a Sect which pretended to more than ordinary strictness in religion.

We read of various sorts of Scribes in the holy scriptures. It seems, by divers passages in the Old Testament, that there were some who might be called royal Scribes, who were great ministers of state ; and, perhaps, might execute any office like to that of a secretary of state, or the secretary of a prince now. And therefore in

^P Heb. 6. 20.

speaking

speaking of the great officers of David's court, in 2 Sam. 8. 16, 17. this is mentioned as one of them. *And Jacob, the son of Zeruiab, was over the host; and Jehoshaphat, the son of Abilud, was recorder; and Zadok, the son of Abitub, and Abimelech, the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe.* So in 2 Kings 12. 10. *And it was so, when they saw there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe, and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord.* By which passages, it seems, the king's scribe was employed in the treasury. In divers other places you may read of the same officer, who may be termed a royal Scribe.

We read of other scribes that seemed to have been employed in a lower station in civil affairs; who used to write much, to make deeds and conveyances. And of such the psalmist speaks, when he says, *My tongue is the pen of a ready writer*¹, or of a ready scribe. And in 1 Chron. 2. 55. we read of *the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites*: by which it seems as if there were certain families who addicted themselves to this employment in especial manner,

¹ Psal. 45. 1.

But farther : there were others who were religious, or ecclesiastical scribes ; such whose business it was to keep the law, to write copies of it, and to see that those copies were very correct : many of whom made it their business to study the law of God, and to explain it to the people ; and therefore were called sometimes *doctors* or *teachers* of the law, and were in great reputation amongst the people of the Jews upon that account. We find commonly in scripture, these *Scribes*, and the *Pharisees* are put together. And our Lord Jesus likens his disciples to a *scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, who is capable of *bringing forth things new and old, out of the treasury of his mind* ^r. Now these seem to be the persons concerned in our text, and of whom we often have an account. And so the words are as much as to say ;
 “ *except your righteousness exceed the right-*
 “ *eousness of those who pretend to be the*
 “ *doctors and expositors of the law among*
 “ *the Jews, those who sit in Moses’s chair,*
 “ *and dictate to the people, and pretend to*
 “ *explain the law to them ; unless your*
 “ *righteousness exceed theirs, who pretend*
 “ *to be so zealous for the law ; you cannot*
 “ *enter into the kingdom of God.*”

The Pharisees were joined with these. As the Scribes were a sort of officers ; so the Pharisees were a particular sect of religion.

^r Mat. 13. 52.

They were Jews : but then they were *the strictest sect of the Jews*^f. Some of the Jews were *Sadducees* ; of whom we often read in the gospel : and some were *Pharisees*. And some make another distinction amongst them ; *viz.* those who were called *Essenes*. But, in all probability, these were some of the stricter sort of the Pharisees.

Their name is thought by some to be derived from a word which signifies *to enlarge*, or *lay open*^g ; because they laid open or *made broad their phylacteries*^h, made a great shew of their keeping the law of God ; or because they exposed their good works, and made a shew of them, were open in their profession, and in the practice of those things wherein they counted religion to consist ; for they prayed openly and publicly *in the corners of the streets*ⁱ, and *did their alms as with the sound of a trumpet*^j. Some derive the word from another which signifies *to explain*, *expound*, or *interpret*^k ; because they pretended, many of them, to be capable of interpreting the law with great accuracy. And others derive it from a word which signifies *to be separated*^l ; because they were separated from the common people, and pretended to extraordinary piety. It seems many of the *Scribes* were *Pharisees* ; as you

^f Acts 26. 5.

^g פרש.

^h Mat. 23. 5.

ⁱ Chap. 6. 5.

^j Ver. 2.

^k פרש.

^l From the last verb in the Conjug. Niph. נפרש.

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see in Acts 23. 7, 8, 9. *There arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees : and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit ; but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry : and the Scribes that were of the Pharisees part arose, and strove, saying, we find no evil in this man ; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. The Scribes that were of the part of the Pharisees.* There were therefore some Scribes who were of the sect of the Pharisees ; and some who had other notions, it seems. But the *Scribes and Pharisees* being so often put together in scripture, seems to signify that the Scribes, a great number of them, were of this sect. And this sect of the Pharisees was the strictest : as appears by the apostle Paul, who declared he was a Pharisee : *After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee*¹. The Pharisees among the Jews were accounted the strictest men in regard of their lives and conversations. It might be rendred *the most accurate sect*² ; the most circumspect and watchful over themselves, and who had the greatest applause among the people for their piety.

So that now you see who these persons were, these *Scribes and Pharisees*, concerning whose *righteousness* our Saviour here

¹ Acts 26. 5.

² κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἵρεσιν.

speaks. They were the doctors, the teachers, the interpreters of the law, reputed to be the best and most eminent expositors they had among them, and who seemed to walk the most strictly and conformably to the law of God. Yet even these were incapable of *entring into the kingdom of God*: and there must be a *righteousness* greater and better than that of *the Scribes and Pharisees*, or else there is no admission into the *kingdom of heaven*.

Having given you some account of them, I proceed now,

III. To speak of the *righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* more particularly. And you see, in the words of our text, it is supposed that their righteousness made a specious appearance. It is supposed that they, and the people in general, thought that such a righteousness as theirs would give them admittance into the kingdom of glory; or else there had not been need for our Saviour to speak with such an emphasis in this matter, to undeceive the people about it. It is implied that their righteousness was a very specious thing in the eyes of the people: and it is certain they had a great value for it, counting themselves very righteous. On the other hand, our Lord expressly declares that it is a very insufficient righteousness; and that a man may fall short of eternal bliss, and must fall short of
of

of it, if his righteousness be no better than theirs. It will be necessary therefore to consider, first, the fairer side of their righteousness; to shew you what a specious appearance it made: and then, on the other side, to treat of its insufficiency; and to shew you the great flaws and defects which were to be found in it.

1. We are to discourse of the specious appearance of this righteousness. And you will easily allow that it did make a fair shew, when the apostle, who was a Pharisee, says of himself, *that, touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless*^a: that is, according to the interpretations then taken up concerning the law. He looked upon himself, as the young man in the gospel did, as one capable of fulfilling the law of God: *All these things, says he, have I done from my youth up; what lack I yet*^b? wherein do I fall short of the perfection of the law? You see, by this, what a mighty appearance their practice and profession made among the people. But let us look into it more particularly.

You have heard, that in general, the Pharisees were the most religious sect among the Jews: and if you take notice of their practice in regard to themselves, to other men, and to God; you will find there was a great appearance of religion amongst them.

^a Phil. 3. 6.

| ^b Mat. 19. 20.

In regard to themselves : they were persons who appeared to be very abstemious, and temperate ; nay, they addicted themselves so to abstinence, that they *fasted* very *frequently* ^c. And they not only addicted themselves to fasting ; but, if we may believe some historians, some of them did mortify themselves after a very strange manner, by putting thorns in their clothes, and in their beds, that they might sleep the less, and attend to their devotion the more ; that they denied themselves many things innocent in themselves, for the sake of mortification, and seemed to have little regard to this world and the things of it, as being in the pursuit of something greater and better, even *the kingdom of heaven*. They were strictly abstinent, even to a fault ; and did more, in this respect, than was required of them by the divine law. Here was a specious appearance of self-denial : and you may know, by what the *Pharisee* is represented to say when he comes to the temple to pray with the *publican*, that he *is not an extortioner, unjust, or an adulterer* ; that he is not *as the publican* ^d ; that they professed an abhorrence of immoralities, and to live very strictly, purely, and abstemiously.

In regard of others : it seems *they gave alms* ; and gave considerably. They published what they did of this kind as with

^c Luke 5. 33.

| ^d Chap. 18. 11.

the sound of a trumpet. It is true, their ostentation was a fault: but this makes it probable they gave abundance of alms among the people. And they had not only a regard to the bodies of men, but would seem to have a special respect to their souls too: for our Saviour declares, *they compassed sea and land to make a proselyte*^e. Thus they appeared zealous, in regard of the souls of others, to bring them to the knowledge of the true religion. They would leave no stone unturn'd to gain a proselyte to their religion; which was, at that time, the best in the world.

Then, as to their devotion and piety towards God, it seemed very great: for they did not content themselves with praying in the temple; but, as if religion was still uppermost in their minds, and as if their zeal was so great that they could not contain themselves, even in the most publick places, they *prayed at the corners of the streets*^f; as if they could not be weary of *well-doing*. And as their prayers were very frequent; so they were often very long^g. And, for the support of the publick worship, they *paid tithes*, even of *mint, anise, and cummin*^h. Abundance of devotion therefore appeared in their behaviour and conduct. Nor did they only appear zealots for the worship of God; but they had amongst

^e Mat. 23. 15.

^f Chap. 6. 5.

^g Mat. 23. 14.

^h Chap. 23. 23.

them

them the great and main doctrines of religion, and some of the most affecting motives to induce men to holiness : for, as they pretended to little in this life, and denied themselves upon several accounts ; so they informed the people that there were rewards to be expected in the world to come. They deterred men from sin, by speaking of future punishments ; and encouraged men to holiness, by setting before them the rewards of the kingdom of heaven. The Sadducees, indeed, were a sect licentious in their doctrine ; pretending that the promises of God had regard to this world only, and not to the world to come ; denying the doctrine of the resurrection ; denying that there were either angels, or spirits ; denying the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body. But the Pharisees held all these truths : and these must be acknowledged to be most excellent motives to promote religion in the world.

So that if you look upon their behaviour with respect to themselves, or their carriage towards others, or their zeal towards God, or the purity of the doctrine they maintained against other of their countrymen, and the great skill they had in the law of God ; they appear to have made a very specious shew of religion. But, notwithstanding this, our Saviour assures us, that *unless* our *righteousness exceed the righteousness* of these men, *we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*
Tho

Tho they were so abstinent, and appeared so circumspect; tho they seemed so afraid of defilement, that when they had conversed with others in the market-place they would wash themselves, to signify how desirous they were to *keep unspotted from the world*ⁱ; notwithstanding that they avoided to keep company with publicans and sinners, those who were openly profane and immoral, as appears by their reproving our Saviour for so doing, who did it only to reform them; notwithstanding they had so much appearance of respect to the souls and bodies of men, and so much seeming delight in acts of piety; notwithstanding they had such zeal for God, and for his worship, as appears by the length of their prayers, and taking all occasions to worship: notwithstanding all this, their righteousness was strangely insufficient and defective. Which leads us now,

2. To take a view of the dark side of the matter, and see what were the great faults and blemishes which were to be found in *the righteousness of these men*. Now,

(1.) Their righteousness was very partial. They seemed indeed zealous on some accounts, and to have devotion and piety, and charity, to be abstinent, and to avoid various sins: but they were partial in the law of God, as the prophet complains of those of old^k; they were zealous for certain things,

ⁱ Mat. 15. 2. Chap. 9. 11. | ^k Mal. 2. 9.

but had no regard to others. They *made long prayers*¹: but they *devoured widows houses*^m. They were very charitable towards some: but they were very covetous, it seems, towards others. They seemed mighty zealous for the souls of men; they would not spare any charge and pains to make a profelyte to their religion: and yet they were cruel to the souls of men, in endeavouring to divert them from the doctrine of Christ, who preached more purely and spiritually than they. They were zealous for the worship of God; as appears by some instances: but if Christ would inform them of any duty, or any act of worship which was not in their scheme of religion, they would not regard him. They were for maintaining the doctrine of the resurrection, and the immortality of the soul; future rewards and punishments: but if the way to heaven was opened by a purer method than theirs, they would *neither enter themselves, nor suffer others to enter thereinto*ⁿ. They would reject our Lord Jesus Christ, and endeavour to make others do so too. Before he was crucified, they had no regard to the doctrine he preached concerning his death and resurrection: no more had they afterwards, such of them as remained unconverted. And thus, as they *made void the law*^o, in certain instances, tho they seemed

¹ Mat. 23. 3.^m Luke 20. 47.ⁿ Mat. 23. 13.^o Chap. 15. 6.

so strict and zealous for it upon other accounts ; so they intirely rejected the gospel. Now it is certainly a great duty, if we will be religious indeed, to have respect unto the whole will of God, as near as we can ; to seek after his mind in every instance ; not only to be zealous, and just, and charitable in some particular instances, but thro' the whole course of our conversations. If a man is unjust, and covetous ; what does it signify, that upon some occasions, he is liberal and charitable ? If a man seem zealous to gain a profelyte, and yet is maliciously bent against those who are stricter in piety than himself ; how partial is he in the instances wherein he ought to manifest his charity ? And so if a man pay ever so much seeming regard to the mind of God, delivered by his servant Moses ; how partial is he, who, at the same time, rejects the ministry of his Son ?

(2.) They were superficial in their righteousness, as well as partial. As they had not respect unto all God's commandments ; so the regard they had to his law, was rather in some external observances, than in those which were more difficult ; *i. e.* the more spiritual part. The law of God extends itself to the heart and desires of a man ; to his thoughts, as well as his words and actions. That law which forbids murder, not only forbids us to kill our neighbour, but forbids us to speak angrily to him
without

without a cause. That precept which forbids adultery, forbids all impure desires: so holy and spiritual is the law of God; as appears by our Saviour's interpretation in this chapter. But they were superficial in their performances: and interpreted the law after such a manner, as to persuade the people that if they abstained from gross and outward immoralities, they were very righteous; *tho seven abominations were in their hearts* ^P. Now God looks at the heart, to see what is in the mind; and in a special manner takes notice of this: for it is the heart that is the root of all sin. *For, out of the heart, says our Saviour, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, and blasphemies: and these are the things which defile a man* ^Q.

And then it appears, farther, that they were superficial in their observance of the law, not only because they made so scanty an interpretation of the moral law, but because they seemed to lay so much stress upon their own performances: and this not only upon the ceremonies of the law, but upon their own traditions; nay, they even *made void the law of God*, to make room for these traditions. This was a superficial sort of religion indeed, this of the Pharisees; in that they took off the mind from the main things which belonged to the law of God,

^P Prov. 26. 25.

^Q Mat. 15. 19, 20.

that they might reconcile it to their manner of life. They laid so mighty a stress upon their own traditions, that a man was esteemed very criminal if he ate with unwashen hands : he transgressed the traditions of the elders. This was a great crime : and yet they could indulge themselves in the breach of the divine law in many instances ; as you may see in reading this chapter. They counted a man was safe enough if he did not kill another ; tho he injured his reputation, and gave way to indecent passions, and uncomely speeches. They pretended that a man, if he did but love his neighbour, might hate his enemy : not considering that our enemies are our neighbours, and that we are to love them ; as our Saviour signifies by the parable of the good Samaritan^r, and in other express words to that purpose. They pretended that a man might swear as he pleased, so he performed his oaths : whereas our Saviour tells us there must be no profane swearing, or taking the name of God in our mouths, and that there must be no swearing by any other name than that of God himself, and that after a solemn manner ; an oath signifying an appeal to the searcher of hearts ; and, seeing God only can search the heart, his name only is to be invoked in a solemn oath. Not only did they do this, and so clip off a great part of what the law prescribed ;

^r Luke 10.

but they set up their own traditions in the room of the law of God.

But farther : that the Pharisees were superficial in their righteousness, appears, in that those lesser things, which the law did really require, were practised by them, but the greater things were neglected. They *tithed mint, anise, and cummin*[†], to shew their zeal for their support of the ministry, according to the word of God ; and, consequently for the support of his worship : but then, as our Lord most justly reproaches them, they *neglected judgment, mercy, and faith*, which were of much greater consequence. Those little things, of *tithing mint, anise, and cummin*, ought not to have been neglected by them : but *judgment, mercy, and faith*, ought to have been minded by them in a more special manner. So that they were superficial in their righteousness.

(3.) They were hypocritical : and this was a dreadful blemish upon them. Our Saviour pronounced woe upon them on this account : and, for the same reason, John the baptist rejected them from his baptism ; because they did not *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*[‡]. They made a great pretence to religion ; but, it seems, there was abundance of dissimulation amongst them, generally speaking. I do not speak of every individual Pharisee ; but, it seems, the ge-

[†] Mat. 23. 23.

[‡] Chap. 3. 8.

nerality of them, in the scripture, had this character. I believe the apostle Paul, before his conversion, when he was a Pharisee, was not an hypocrite. He himself declared, before the high priest, that he *had exercised himself to walk in all good conscience till that day* : and when he acknowledges the guilt of having been *a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious* ; he says it was *thro' ignorance that he did it, and unbelief* ^u. But our Saviour justly reproaches these Pharisees of hypocrisy : who made such great pretensions to piety themselves, and so unjustly accused him : who, while they pretended to give abundance of alms, yet were such great dissemblers, that their design was to prey upon poor widows : when *they prayed*, it was *that they might be seen of men* ; and, when *they gave alms*, it was for the same end : therefore *they had their reward*. They did not do these things because they loved God, or his worship ; but that they might have applause amongst men : therefore they gave their alms in the most publick manner. They were hypocrites, because they would magnify the faults of others ; and, at the same time, would not *pluck the beam out of their own eyes*, when they seemed so *offended at the mote in the eyes* of others. This was a great evil indeed, that tho there was such a shew of religion, there should be so great

} Acts 23. 1.

| 1 Tim. 1. 13.

hypocrisy

hypocrisy amongst them: which is a vice abhorred both by God and man.

(4.) Another great blemish upon them was, that in their exercise of religion, and the good works which they did, they were vain-boasters: and this took off the glory even of all the good works which they did, because they prided themselves in their performances; instead of acknowledging, as Christ teaches, that *they were unprofitable servants*, and that *they did no more than they ought to do*^v. They gloried in their own righteousness; and had the confidence, not only to *justify themselves before men*^w, but even before God^x: as if they would vindicate themselves from all evil. Now pride is hateful in the sight of God; and seems to be one of the greatest vices, a fundamental evil. It was the occasion of the fall of our first parents: and it seems to have been the ruin of the angels that fell; *who kept not their first estate*^y, but aspired to something they had not, to some station which God had not allotted to them. The greatest indication of their sin that is given us in the holy scripture, seems to be this of pride; in that they *kept not their first state*. This must be a mighty defect; because our Lord shews, elsewhere, how impossible it is for a man to enter into his kingdom if he be not meek and humble, and does not

^v Luke 17. 10.

^w Chap. 16. 15.

^x Luke 18. 11.

^y Jude 6.

behave himself *like a little child* ². For, a man to do any good act, and then to boast of it before men, and especially before God, when he hath not done so much as his duty; to have vain-glorious thoughts concerning himself, and to swell with pride and vanity, as if the Almighty were beholden to him, and as if he were free from sin; this is a most high affront to the majesty of God, and shews a profound ignorance of the evil of sin, and of a man's own share in that evil.

Now these things shew, that *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, whatever pretence they made, was but very small and inconsiderable, and unworthy to be accepted of God. For tho divers things they did were materially good, and they made a pompous shew of them; yet there was so much partiality in their regards to the law of God, and so many superstitions in advancing their own traditions before it; their righteousness was so superficial, and consisted so much in the exercise of lesser rather than greater duties; there was so much hypocrisy, which is so odious in the sight of God; and so much pride, and vain-glory attending what they did; that our Saviour might well say, *Unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*. Methinks it is easy for every one to see, that the cha-

² Mat. 18. 4.

rafter of their righteousness, if it be such as hath been shewn you, could, by no means, give them admittance into the kingdom of heaven. Pride, the very sin which cast the angels from heaven, would effectually prevent these people's entring into it. Hypocrisy before God, who is *the searcher of the heart, and the trier of the reins*^a; a partial regard to God's law, which is so *pure and holy*; and a superficial regard to that which reaches the very soul, and regards our thoughts and words, as well as actions, must be very far from entitling them to glory, when God looks upon the heart as the main thing. I need not insist farther on their character, to shew you that it is the most reasonable thing in the world to conclude with our Lord Jesus Christ in this sentence he gives; that such a righteousness could not give them admittance into heaven.

What I have still before me, is to shew you what kind of righteousness that is which our Saviour here intends, when he speaks of a *righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*: which is but a general and indefinite character of it. But it is necessary for us to consider, not only that it must be a righteousness greater than theirs, but to give a particular account of the characters of this righteousness; what a kind of righteousness it is, which, if a man hath, he shall *enter into the kingdom of God*.

^a Rev. 2. 23.

For our Lord intimates, that whereas the righteousness of the Pharisees would not introduce them into the kingdom of heaven ; there is a righteousness, which, when men have, it will make them meet for the kingdom of heaven. But the time being gone, I shall leave these things to another opportunity : and conclude, for the present, by making two or three reflections upon what hath been said. And,

I. We may here take notice, that as *the kingdom of heaven* signifies a state of glory ; the true religion is the most excellent, in regard of its motives and rewards. What were the things the heathens proposed to themselves ? As their fancies were without ground ; so the future enjoyments they promised themselves, were suited to their carnal appetites : such were the pleasures of the Elysian fields, the pleasures of a place or state agreeable to the sensual desires of men in this world. And as present enjoyments, which excite the carnal appetite, will certainly more easily engage the minds of men than those motives which are taken from the same desires, in their reference to another world ; so, if in their opinion nothing but carnal pleasure or the satisfaction of the sensual appetite is to be had in another world, then it is no wonder that men will please their senses in this. For, since they can enjoy the same objects of sense in this world, they will

will rather have these enjoyments now, than defer the gratification of their desires to a future state, in which they are only to expect a happiness of the same kind.

The same may be said of the Mahometan religion ; which is calculated to please and gratify the lusts and carnal appetites of men, and not to promote true virtue and piety. But how excellent is the true religion, in that it proposes so noble and excellent a reward, even a kingdom ? *Fear not, little flock ; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* ^b : the kingdom of heaven. It is a spiritual and glorious kingdom : substantial happiness indeed ! to sit down in the kingdom of God as *heirs of glory, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ* ; to enjoy that blessedness which is past the expression of man, as it is past his conception ; *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive* how great it is ^c. It is this our Lord proposes for our encouragement ; a heavenly state, a state of glory and purity ; a state becoming so great a person to propose, as it is becoming the merit, and worth the glorious sacrifice of Christ to purchase.

And if the motives of our holy religion are so great ; how should we exceed others, in the discharge of the duties of it, who have no such motives set before them ? Is

^b Luke 12, 32.]

^c 1 Cor. 2. 9.

it not a shame that those who profess Christianity are not strict in holiness and piety, when they have such a glorious reward proposed to them for their encouragement? Is it not a shame if they abandon religion, when they have so much reason to abandon all things else for the sake of it; and *not to account the sufferings of this present life worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be enjoyed hereafter*^d? Shall we think any thing too much to do or suffer, provided we may, at last, *enter into the kingdom of heaven*?

As the glorious reward proposed, shews the excellency of our holy religion; so it shews the ignorance, the folly, and vanity of those who postpone the kingdom of heaven to temporal advantages: who had rather *enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*^e, than a state of everlasting glory. As it shews the excellency of religion, that it proposes such rewards; so those men proclaim their folly, who despise it: and they may be sure great will be their condemnation, who would not hearken to such counsel, and be moved by such motives. I may say, in this case, to them, as Naaman's servant said to him, when he was to wash in the river of Jordan, and would not do it: *If it were a great thing that the prophet had required you to do, would you not have done it?*

^d Rom. 8. 18.| ^e Heb. 11. 26.

how much more, when he only says unto you, Wash, and be clean^f ? If many more tribulations were to be undergone by us, than any to which we can be exposed, and we were to do a great many more duties than our holy religion enjoins ; if there were greater things required of us ; should we not be willing to do them for the kingdom of heaven ? How much more, when Christ's yoke is so easy, and his burden so light^g ; when all his commands carry with them so much pleasure and delight here, and are attended with such a reward hereafter, even an eternal weight of glory^h ?

2. We may infer from these words of our Saviour, that it is necessary that persons be *righteous*, if they will *enter into the kingdom of God*. Or else why should our Lord say, *Unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you can in no case enter into the kingdom of God ?*

This also vindicates the purity of the doctrine of Christianity, that it connects righteousness and rewards together. There is a glorious reward set before us : but there is no entering into heaven without righteousness ; and that *righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, or else we cannot enter there.

^f 2 Kings 5. 13.

^g Mat. 11. 30.

^h 2 Cor. 4. 17.

3. To conclude. Let us then consider with ourselves, that it is not enough for us to have the name of Christians, or to be esteemed religious persons ; to *have an external form of godliness*, if we *deny the power of it*ⁱ. It is not enough to be found in our judgments ; that we worship God according to the method which he prescribes, and that we exercise charity towards men, towards their souls and bodies : but we must take care that our religion be all of a piece ; that we so govern ourselves, our hearts, and lives ; that we so worship God, and carry ourselves after such a manner towards men, that our religion may not be partial, and mix'd with vain traditions and superstitions. And, in a special manner, must we have a care of hypocrisy and vain-glory : for God *requires truth in the inward parts*^k, sincerity in our hearts, and deep humility ; without which we cannot be the true disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, nor enter into his kingdom. Let us consider that religion is such a thing, that it must reign in our souls. We must *be holy in all manner of conversation*^l : we must be strict and circumspect ; and *then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all God's righteous commandments*. It is true, the best must acknowledge that they are *unprofitable servants*^m. But none deserve the name of

ⁱ 2 Tim. 3. 5.^k Psal. 51. 6.^l 1 Pet. 1. 15.^m Luke 17. 10.

Christians, who are not upright and sincere, and whose labour and desire is not to be conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ; that they may *be perfect and complete in all the will of Godⁿ.* *What they know not, they will desire to be taught: and wherein they have done evil, they will resolve to do so no more^o.*

ⁿ Col. 4. 12.

| • Job 34. 32.



S E R.



S E R M O N VI.

MATT. V. 20.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The second S E R M O N on this text.



OUR Saviour, in this very extraordinary and most excellent discourse, having, as I told you before, represented the great rewards which will attend those whom he characterizes in the beginning of the chapter ; as, *the poor in spirit, the meek, such as hungred and thirsted after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and such as are persecuted for righteousness-sake* ; he goes, after this, upon the explication of the law. And to clear his way, and to rescue the divine institutions from those gross mistakes and misinterpretations which were put upon them by the Pharisees and Scribes, and at the same time
to

to shew what was the true sense and meaning of the law of God, and to press men to a conformity to it; he at large opens his mind in the sequel of this chapter, and in the two chapters ensuing. The people had a great veneration for the authority of the Scribes and Pharisees: and not only for the authority of their doctrine, but for that of their example; because, as they pretended themselves to be very regular and circumspect in their conversation, so they managed their outward course of life in such a manner as to gain the same credit amongst the people, who looked upon them as the most strict and circumspect persons in their generation. However, our Saviour sees it necessary to undeceive the people, who had been long abused by the evil and erroneous glosses of the Pharisees; takes upon him to detect their vain interpretations, and misconstructions of the law; and pronounces, in the verse before our text, that *those who should break one of the least of those commandments, to which he referr'd, and should teach men so, should be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever did, and taught them, should be called great in the kingdom of heaven*^P. As much as if our Saviour had said: "It is not what men pretend to, but what they really do; it is not enough that the Pharisees pretend to teach the

^P Mat. 5. 19.

“ law better than others, and to fulfill it
 “ in their practise better than other men ;
 “ many of those who make these high pre-
 “ tences to knowledge and holiness, will be
 “ found to come very short of what they
 “ would have believed concerning them.
 “ *I am not come to destroy the law and the pro-*
 “ *phets, but to fulfill*^a. And I am so far from
 “ destroying the law, that is, the moral law,
 “ that I pronounce it is of the highest conse-
 “ quence for men both to do and teach it ;
 “ and that with great strictness and exactness,
 “ in its full extent : *For he that breaks the*
 “ *least of these commandments, and teaches men*
 “ *to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of*
 “ *heaven.* And, for the encouragement of
 “ *those who do and teach them, they shall be*
 “ *called great in the kingdom of heaven.* It is
 “ a dangerous thing for a man to neglect any
 “ part of his duty ; either in obeying the law
 “ itself, or in his instructions to others about
 “ it. But the Scribes and Pharisees are so far
 “ from deserving to be *called great in the king-*
 “ *dom of heaven,* or from having a just pre-
 “ tence unto that character, that they cannot,
 “ in the least, be reckoned meet for it. Under
 “ their circumstances, they shall not even be
 “ counted among the *least in the kingdom of*
 “ *heaven:* for it is impossible for men to enter
 “ there, *unless their righteousness exceed that*
 “ *of the Scribes and Pharisees.*” That is, in

^a Mat. 5, 17.

short, as I have told you ; unless men be more holy than the generality, at least, of the Scribes and Pharisees were, it is impossible for them to be saved. For our completer understanding of which words, I proposed to consider them in the following method :

- I. To shew you what is meant by *the kingdom of heaven*.
- II. What kind of people these *Scribes and Pharisees* were.
- III. What kind of *righteousness* theirs was.
- IV. What kind of *righteousness* that is, which is necessary in order to persons *entring into the kingdom of heaven* ; seeing *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* was not sufficient to that purpose. And,
- V. How it appears that it is *impossible* for any one *to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, who hath not that *righteousness* which our Saviour speaks of ; *a righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees*.

I have endeavoured to prove to you,
1. That tho *the kingdom of heaven* is variously accepted in the gospel, yet here it signifies the kingdom of glory.

I have shewn you, in the 2d place, That the Scribes were a sort of officers among the

Jews ; and the Scribes, here mentioned, those who made the law of God more especially their study, and therefore were the principal teachers of the people : and that the Pharisees were a sect of men who distinguished themselves from others, pretending to greater piety, greater purity of doctrine, and manners ; they were, as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles, *the strictest sect among the Jews* ^r.

I came, in the 3d place, To consider what kind of *righteousness* that of *the Scribes and Pharisees* was. I have shewn you, on the one hand, that it was very specious, and made a great appearance in the world ; and, on the other, that it was very defective : and therefore unless one had a greater, a better and more excellent righteousness than theirs, there was *no entering*, by our Saviour's declaration, *into that glorious kingdom*. I have shewn you that their righteousness, if we take a view of it on its brighter side, was very popular, and much respected by men. For they pretended to a great purity in doctrine, and did teach certain important truths concerning the other world ; the resurrection of the dead, the existence of angels and spirits, the immortality of the soul ; such things as were denied by other Jews, and were all weighty doctrines. They seemed pious towards God, very devout, and

^r Acts 26. 5.

spent much time in prayer ; not only in the temple, but even *in the corners of the streets*. They walked towards men after such a manner as gained a great credit and reputation amongst them : they avoided the conversation of persons who were infamously wicked ; and would *wash their hands when they came from the markets*, lest they should have conversed with any who were vicious, and not know it. They were for *tithing mint, anise, and cummin*. They were extensive in their bounty to the poor ; and *gave alms*, it seems, to considerable numbers of people. They were very abstemious, in *fasting twice a-week* : and some of them, as Josephus represents, some of the strictest of them, would mortify themselves after an extraordinary manner ; which had a great shew of humility. But, notwithstanding these things, and some others, that might be collected from the scripture, which we have more largely taken notice of ; it seems their righteousness was very defective, as I have shewn you, on various accounts. It was partial ; in that they did not regard the law of God intirely. It was superficial ; in that they had a regard more to the external part than that which is spiritual, which reaches the heart and conscience. Their obedience was hypocritical to a great degree ; as appears by what our Saviour says concerning it, and from what he pronounces against them in so many places. They added

their own traditions, and superstitious inventions, to the law of God ; and laid a stress upon them as great, and sometimes greater, than upon the law itself. And even their best works were marr'd with pride, with ostentation, and vain-glory : so that there was more of the love of applause than virtue appearing even in their best actions, they were tainted with so much vanity. So that we may justly complain of them, as the prophet Micah complains of the best sort of Jews in his time : *The best of them is as a briar ; and the most upright of them is sharper than a thorn-hedge*¹. Or, as John the baptist reproaches them, when he calls them *a generation of vipers*².

Having given you this account how far we proceeded ; we are now,

IV. To inquire what kind of righteousness that is, which our Saviour intends here, as necessary to a person's *entring into the kingdom of heaven*.

For the more regular proceeding in this inquiry ; I shall first consider, in a general way, what kind of righteousness this is : and then explain it more particularly, in opposition to the *righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, or the defects of their righteousness ; because our Saviour here makes the comparison. And we shall the better know

¹ Micah 7. 4.

| ² Luke 3. 7.

how much this righteousness exceeds theirs, when we consider the particular characters by which it appears to excel.

1. As to the kind of righteousness in general. There are but two kinds which are necessary to our admission into the kingdom of heaven; that righteousness by which we must be justified, and that by which we must be sanctified. You know how necessary that righteousness by which we must be justified is for our admission into the kingdom of heaven, by what is discoursed of in Rom. 5. where the apostle expressly tells us of *a righteousness imputed to us*: and by what the same apostle declares, 2 Cor. 5. 21. that *Christ was made sin for us*, that is, by imputation, *who knew no sin*; that *we might be made the righteousness of God in him*. This is that *righteousness* of which the same apostle speaks to the Philippians, chap. 3. *in which he desires to be found*; not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but the *righteousness which is of God by faith*: that righteousness which is called the *righteousness of faith*; because it is apprehended by our faith, and whereby we are *justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses*; as is asserted by the apostle, Acts 13. 39. It is certain this is necessary to our introduction into the kingdom of heaven. If Christ's obedience, and his sufferings, are necessary for our admission into heaven; then that righteousness which we

find in his obedience to the law of God, and in his submission to the cruel sufferings of the cross, is necessary to this purpose. There is no pardon, no reconciliation, no justification and acceptance of our persons before God, without it. *We are justified freely by his grace, thro' the redemption that is in Jesus Christ^t: and thereby we have peace with God^u; and not otherwise.*

But then there is another kind of righteousness, that of sanctification, which is necessary to our entrance into the kingdom of God: *for no unclean thing shall enter there^v; without holiness no man shall see the Lord^w; and seeing the Lord, is the same thing with entering into the kingdom of heaven. Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters; and whosoever loveth and maketh a lye^x: they are kept out of this kingdom; but those who are pure and holy, have admision there. Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in thro' the gates into the city^y. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God^z. These, and many other places, which speak as expressly and formally to this matter, shew us, that sanctification, i. e. inherent righteousness, is necessary to our entering into the*

^t Rom. 3. 24.

^u Chap. 5. 1.

^v Rev. 21. 27.

^w Heb. 12. 14.

^x Rev. 22. 15.

^y Ver. 14.

^z Mat. 5. 8.

kingdom

kingdom of God. There must be a renovation of the mind of man ; a new creation : he must be *born again*, or he cannot see the *kingdom of heaven*^a. His heart must be changed by the power of the grace of God : his mind must be altered, his inclinations turned, his affections purified and refined : and he must walk holily, because *without holiness it is impossible to see the face of God*^b ; as *without faith it is impossible to please him*^c.

But now the question is, which of these two is concerned in our text ? I think it is evident that the last is concerned, and that only, in the words of this text. It is true, from divers other texts it appears, that we must be justified by the *righteousness* which exceeds not only *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, but the righteousness of all other creatures whatsoever : it is true, I say, from many scriptures, that without being justified we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. But the sense of our text is, that *without holiness*, without inherent righteousness, and to such a degree as to *exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. This is easily prov'd, if you consider three or four things.

(1.) The express words of the text, with regard to the Scribes and Pharisees : *For I say unto you, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and*

^a John 3. 3.

^b Heb. 12. 14.

^c Chap. 11. 6.

Pharisees,

Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. The discourse of our Saviour is about that righteousness by which men conform themselves to the law of God. The Pharisees did conform themselves, in some degree, but not after that manner they ought to have done. Their righteousness was very defective : and therefore it is the plain and genuine sense of our Lord Jesus, that we must conform ourselves to the law of God with greater strictness and circumspection than the Scribes and Pharisees did ; or else we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

(2.) Our Lord speaks of this righteousness as *our* righteousness : *Unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.* It seems necessary therefore to interpret these words as having regard unto *our* inherent righteousness. The righteousness by which we are justified, is Christ's righteousness : but the righteousness by which we are sanctified, is called *ours* ; because our souls are the subjects of it. It is a righteousness wrought in our souls. And *our* righteousness is opposed, in scripture, to the righteousness whereby we are justified ; to the righteousness of Christ. And thus the apostle to the Philippians desires, *not to be found in his own righteousness* ^d. It is not likely therefore, if our Lord had meant that

^d Phil. 3. 9.

of justification here in our text, that he would have called the righteousness whereby we are justified, *our* righteousness; because it is asserted plainly, in scripture, that we cannot be justified by *our own righteousness*: nay, not that which is wrought in us by the grace of God, by the effectual operation of his spirit; we cannot be saved by that. It is by the obedience of Christ that *many are made righteous*^e, in point of justification. So that if we will interpret this text according to the current of the sacred scriptures, it must be acknowledged that *our* righteousness means inherent righteousness; that righteousness of which *our souls* are the subjects. If it had been meant of justification, then it would have been spoken of in other terms. For tho the righteousness of Christ is, in a sort, *made ours* by imputation; yet it is not so express in the scripture as to be called *our righteousness*, after the manner this is here in the text. He indeed is called *the Lord our righteousness*^f; and we are said to be *made the righteousness of God in him*^g: but we are still told it is his righteousness whereby we are justified. And that righteousness is not called *ours*: and especially it is not likely it was so here, since if ~~our~~ Lord had intended the righteousness of justification, it would have been so necessary for him to have explained that doctrine at the same

^e Rom. 5. 19.^f Jer. 23. 6.^g 2 Cor. 5. 21.

time ; seeing the Scribes and Pharisees, and the rest of the people, seemed to be so ignorant of it.

(3.) This farther appears, if we compare the words of our text with what immediately goes before. Our Lord is asserting, that *he came not to destroy the law* : and he declares in ver. 19. *whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments*, that is, of the moral law, *and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven ; but whosoever does and teaches them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*. Here are two things in question in our text : how righteous persons ought to be ; and then, what reward there shall be of that righteousness. In the words before our text, our Lord was speaking of the same reward of *the kingdom of heaven*, and of the degrees of glory in it ; who should be little, and who should be great : and he is likewise speaking of *breaking and keeping the law* ; and he is upon the same subject in our text. If therefore, in the words immediately before our text, he promises a reward of *greatness in the kingdom of heaven* to men who were holy, and kept the law, and taught men so ; he does so here. It is necessary therefore that the *righteousness* in our text be the same as *doing and teaching the law* ; and therefore must be that of sanctification, or inherent righteousness. The words after our text do make this as plain as the words before :

before : for, as our Saviour introduces the text with these words, *For I say unto you ;* which *for* does connect the words to those going before ; so he explains himself afterwards, by shewing how defective *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* was, in explaining the law, in explaining what it did require of us. *You have heard it hath been said by them of old time,* says he, *Thou shalt not kill : and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment.* But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca,* shall be in danger of the council ; but whosoever shall say, *Thou fool,* shall be in danger of hell-fire ^p. Here we may observe two things.

1. That our Saviour shews what will be the danger of transgressing the law ; which is expressed by the terms of *judgment, council, and hell-fire* : and therefore by a parity of reason he is shewing, in our text, what will be the reward of those who observe the law.

The 2d observation I make, is, that when our Lord had shewn in general *the righteousness of the Pharisees* was very defective ; he here explains it, and shews how we should keep the law, if we would *enter into the kingdom of heaven*. He shews that we should not only

^h Mat. 5. 21, 22.

abstain from actual murder in killing a man ; but must bridle our passions, so as not to give ill language, or conceive indecent resentments in our minds against others. And then in *ver. 27.* *You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* Our Saviour here again shews it is not enough for a man to govern himself as to his external conversation ; but he must govern his heart, and his thoughts, if he would be obedient to the law : and the like may be said concerning other precepts. He shews us the duty of mortification ; that these darling corruptions, these evil inclinations, which are as near to us as our *right-hand*, or *right-eye*, must be cut off, and plucked out ⁱ, if we would avoid everlasting destruction. He then shews that men were not guiltless, for doing that which they were permitted to do thro' the hardness of their hearts ; in *sending away a woman with a bill of divorcement, for any cause less than fornication* ^k. And then, having added, that it had been said of old time, *thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths* ; our Saviour shews they might, in this respect, be criminal, tho they did not forswear themselves ; that they took the

ⁱ Mat. 5. 29, 30.| ^k Ver. 31, 32.

name of God in vain, if, upon any slight and trivial occasion, they made use of an oath; and it seems, upon such occasions, our Lord forbids them *to swear at all*¹. They were likewise charg'd by him as guilty of great evil, in *swearing by heaven, and by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by their head*; because as God is the only object of worship, as God only knows the heart, and an oath is an appeal to *the searcher of hearts*, it is improper to swear by any other but him. I might shew you, in a great many other instances, how our Saviour explain'd to them the obligations of charity, the manner of giving alms; how he directed them in acts of piety, in praying, and the like; and in forgiving of injuries, and loving not only their friends, but their enemies. But this is sufficient to my present purpose; to prove, that it is the design of our Saviour, in the sequel of his discourse, to shew how men should be righteous, how they ought to observe the law of God, that they might have a *righteousness to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*; and, *without which, they cannot enter into the kingdom of God*.

I need insist no farther upon this; for, I think, it is plainly proved what righteousness it is which is concerned in our text: tho I may add this one consideration; that if our Saviour had meant a righteousness of

¹ Mat. 5. 33 — 37.

justification, he might as well have said, *Unless your righteousness exceed not only that of the Scribes and Pharisees, but the righteousness of all mankind in general, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven* : and the righteousness you must be justified by, must be a righteousness exceeding the righteousness of all the world put together. How can any imagine that our Lord would put the case so low, *Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*, if he had meant a righteousness of justification ? He must therefore mean the righteousness of sanctification, that this must *exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* ; or else why does he mention their names ? For the righteousness of justification must exceed theirs, and all others besides : so that it would be to no purpose to mention their names particularly.

Having shewn you what this righteousness is in the general, that it is to be holy, that it is inherent righteousness ; we are now,

2. To consider, in a particular manner, wherein *our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees*. And I need not be long upon this ; because it will be proper for me to compare the characters of the righteousness which Christ recommends, with those of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, which have been mentioned before. The excellency of the one, and the defects

defects of the other, will best appear when they are set together in the same light. Therefore,

(1.) Whereas their righteousness, as hath been told you, was partial, they seemed to obey some laws, but rejected others; ours must be universal. Not that there is any man who lives and does not sin; nor may we pretend that any man understands the full scope of the divine law in all the instances of it; good men have been, and are defective: but we ought to be impartial in our resolutions, in the inclinations and desires of our minds; and so far as God gives us light and opportunity, our resolutions, and desires, and endeavours, must be *to have respect unto all his laws.* *Then shall I not be ashamed,* says the psalmist, *when I have respect to all thy commandments*^m. Can a man be honest and upright, who, when he sees the same authority enjoins several things, will transgress the law, and affront its authority in some of those instances, and, at the same time, pretend to a great deal of respect to it in others? The Pharisees *gave alms*, but yet were very covetous: as if it were an acceptable offering to God to shew themselves charitable, to perform acts of charity with that money which they had gotten by extortion: as if it were a meritorious action in them to re-

^m Psal. 119. 6.

lieve some poor families, when they had *devoured widows houses* to gain substance to themselves : or as if it were enough to *make long prayers* to God, while they carried on designs to cheat men. In many instances it appeared they were very partial : they seemed to have a great regard to some laws ; they would *pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin* ; but, at the same time, *neglected judgment, mercy, and faith*ⁿ. Thus partial was their righteousness : but the obligation we are under to holiness, if we would *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, is to *abstain from all evil*, to *abhor that which is evil*^o ; nay, to *abstain from all appearances of evil*^p. We must have hearty desires and resolutions to *have respect unto all God's righteous precepts*, so far as we find *what is his good and acceptable will*, if we would be expectants of heaven, and candidates of glory. And whenever we err, and are defective, it will occasion a godly sorrow, if our souls have such a regard to the divine will. This will be the drift, the bent, and inclination of our minds, to have respect to the whole law of God ; that we *may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work*^q.

(2.) Another character of this holiness which must *exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees*, is ; that it must be principally

ⁿ Mat. 23. 23.

^o Rom. 12. 9.

^p 1 Thes. 5. 22.

^q Col. 1. 10.

internal,

internal, in opposition to theirs, which was chiefly superficial. This was a great defect: they did not only disregard some of God's precepts; but they had often the greatest regard to those which were of the least moment, and slighted those that were of the highest consequence: as in what I instanced but now; in their *tithing mint, anise, and cummin*; and *neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith*. If we would be strictly pious, truly religious, we must look to our hearts, and *try our own ways*^r; and be able to appeal to him, who *knows the secrets of all hearts*, that we do so; and that we earnestly desire of him to reform and regulate what is amiss in us. *Search me, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*^t. It is not enough for us to perform external acts of holiness and piety, or to appear with a countenance that carries with it an air of devotion; unless our souls are touch'd, our affections mov'd; unless *our desires be to God, and to the remembrance of his name*^t. Unless we improve in knowledge and in grace, and in the internal habits of our minds, God will not accept our services, our external forms, and our appearance of devotion. It is not enough to abstain from those actions which will bring disreputation upon us

^r Lam. 3. 40.^t Psal. 139. 23, 24.^t Isa. 26. 8.

amongst men ; but we must *love* that *truth*, which, as the psalmist says, *God requires in the inward parts* ^u. We must have a good and honest heart, if we would be truly holy ; and mind especially the internal prevalence of piety in our souls. *The tree must be good, or else the fruit will not be so* ^v. The heart of man is especially regarded by God ; because it is the most excellent part. And tho a man put on a shew of religion, and do some things which are materially good ; unless he do them with an honest heart, they will not be acceptable to God. We must place religion in those things which are of the highest consequence, that our religion may be wise and prudent. Superstitious persons will shew abundance of zeal in some lesser matters, when they neglect the greatest business ; faith, love, charity, humility, and piety. But where there is true religion, and such as God approves, there must be a reformation of our souls, and the work of God must be carried on in our inner man ; that so we may have a steady and constant regard to piety and holiness, in the course of our conversations. This must be the care of one who is truly religious ; and will certainly be his care. And this leads me to observe,

(3.) That it must be sincere, in opposition to hypocritical ; as it must be internal, in

^u Psal. 51. 6.

| ^v Luke 6, 43.

opposition to superficial holiness. It must be placed in things which are, in a special manner, excellent: but then the whole of it must be sincere; for a man may seem to lay a great stress upon things which are of the highest consequence in religion, and yet may be hypocritical at bottom. It is a great act of worship to pray to God: and the Pharisees did this often; and they *made long prayers*: but it was only for a pretence, that under this specious appearance they might deceive and cheat the people who admired and followed them: *For a pretence, they made long prayers*^w, says our Saviour. I need not take up much of your time upon this: for every one knows that if our piety, if our religion, if our practice of holiness, if our moral conversation amongst men, if our good and savoury speeches, are not sincere; we are so far from being pious, holy persons, that we are so much the more wicked, by how much the higher pretence we make to religion. For this is a being guilty of that sin which is so justly hated of men, and abhorred of God, that, it seems, a portion of the greatest punishment is allotted to it. The unfaithful servant, whose punishment is expressed to be very great, is ordered *amongst hypocrites; where there is weeping, and gnashing of teeth*^x. It is as high an affront to God, and an abuse to man, for a person to

^w Mat. 23. 14.| ^x Chap. 24. 51.

be hypocritically pious, or just, or holy, as for him to want piety, holiness, and justice; and, to all the rest of his evils, to add one of the greatest crimes in the world besides. So that it is plain there must be sincerity; and this sincerity ought to be universal. If there wants sincerity, it will spoil the most specious actions: but this sincerity must go thro' the whole course of our conversations.

(4.) Our holiness must be free from superstition, as much as possible. It is true, that very serious persons sometimes may be guilty of superstition: but it ought to be the desire and endeavour of every person, and is necessarily so of every one who is truly religious, to keep his devotion and his conversation free from superstition; because this is offensive to God. The Pharisees join'd their traditions to the law of God; as if they would make up their defect of conformity to the law by some inventions of their own, or their ancestors, which God had not commanded. They would defile themselves with sin; and then they would be accounted holy, for *washing their hands often*^y, and making use of various immersions which were not required by the law of God. But our Saviour says; *In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commands of men*^z. We should therefore strive, as much as possible,

^y Mark 7. 2.

^z Mat. 15. 9.

to keep ourselves from the contagion of superstition, lest we should give that authority to the dictates of men which is due only to the holy law of God ; lest we should vainly spend our time about idle customs and traditions, which may be profitably spent in meditating upon the law of God, and in aspiring after a conformity to it ; lest we should fall under a temptation to set these above the divine precepts, and *make void the law of God*^a, as the Pharisees did, by amusing ourselves with things which are of no consequence, but rather tend to taint and corrupt the soul, and spoil that spiritual gust which we ought to have. We should have a distinguishing relish for the law of God, before all the commandments of men. Our *righteousness* ought to *exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*,

(5.) In being adorned with humility. *Be ye clothed with humility*^b, says the apostle Peter. And it is not only a clothing to hide our defects, but an *ornament*^c to adorn our conversation. Pride is a sin abhorred of God : and it renders a man mean and little in the view of discreet and wise men. It is a sin of which the Pharisees were greatly guilty : and nothing is more misbecoming a person who pretends to religion, than that affectation and vanity which shews he is proud of his performances. What can that

^a Mat. 15. 6.^b 1 Pet. 5. 5.^c Chap. 3. 4.

service be worth which is tainted with vain-glory? what can it be worth in the sight of God, *who resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*^d? We find the most holy men, in the Old Testament, speak of themselves to God in terms of the most profound humility. Abraham calls himself *dust and ashes*; and prefaces his prayer with, *Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes*^e. Job, of whom God himself boasts, *hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil*^f: yet even he prostrates himself before the Almighty, and cries out; *I have heard of thee by the bearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*^g. The apostle Paul, who seems to have been the most eminent servant of God that ever appeared in the world for his preaching-capacity, and for his successes in converting a multitude of souls, calls himself *less than the least of all saints*^h, *the chief of sinners*ⁱ, and one who was *not worthy to be called an apostle*^k. With what an abhorrence does God reject the services of those who are proud and vain-glorious, whose chief aim is that others may

^d 1 Pet. 5. 5.^e Gen. 18. 27.^f Job 1. 8.^g Chap. 42. 5, 6.^h Eph. 3. 8.ⁱ 1 Tim. 1. 15.^k 1 Cor. 15. 9.

take notice of their pretended piety, and celebrate their praises; instead of considering, that the true and proper end of our worshipping God, is that he and he alone may be glorified? How many of our works which are materially good, are lost and spoiled upon this account? How many acts of charity might meet with a reward from the hand of God, if they were not tainted with this corrupt principle? But when men give alms, not because the persons to whom they give bear the image of God, but because they would gain reputation amongst men; our Saviour says, *they have their reward*¹; they have all they are to expect. And so one may say concerning other acts which are materially good; how vain and vile do they appear, when the person who performs them is guilty of this vain-glory and ostentation? There must be simplicity therefore, and integrity of mind, joined with this humility; which is *an ornament of great price in the sight of God*^m.

And then *our righteousness* will indeed exceed *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*; if in our devotion towards God, and our conversation amongst men, and in the government of our own souls and bodies; if in the exercise of piety and religion, and justice and charity, of temperance, and the

¹ Mat. 6. 2. •| ^m 1 Pet. 3. 4.

government of our own passions ; if in all things we have regard to the whole of God's will, and endeavour to be conformed and to subject ourselves to all his righteous precepts ; if we have a regard to the internal exercise of piety, charity and justice ; to the motions of our minds, as well as to our hands, and eyes, and lips ; to the great and important matters of our duty, in a special manner, not leaving undone things which may seem of lesser consequence, counting all great in regard to the authority of the law-giver, tho they are not great in their own nature ; if we are sincere and upright in the management of the whole of our duty ; if we are desirous to be conformable to God's law so strictly as not to admit of any competition betwixt that and the precepts of men ; if we are holy and regular, without superstition, and without profaning the law of God with corrupt mixtures, according to the best of our light and knowledge ; if we are sincerely *holy, and upright in all manner of conversation*, and endeavour to preserve all from the corrupt mixture of will-worship and superstition, and in all acknowledge ourselves *unprofitable servants* ; being still *clothed with humility*, doing what we do to please God, being sensible of the excellency of his law, and not to gain applause among men ; doing what we do out of a pure conscience, without regard to sinister ends ; doing what we do unto God, out of zeal for his glory,
and

and from a tender regard to the good of others, and a careful concern for the salvation of our own souls.

This is the character, take it altogether, of the holiness which our Lord recommends in our text, and in the sequel of this chapter : where he explains the law to these great purposes ; as you will more particularly see, if you'll give yourselves time to read our Saviour's sermon through. This is the character of that righteousness which *exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.*

I would not that any one should, from what hath been said, so misconstrue me as to imagine that in order to enter the heavenly kingdom a man must rise up to these characters in the highest degree ; for that would be to be perfectly holy. He who hath all these things in perfection, is fit for the kingdom of heaven : but there is no inhabitant of this world can pretend to that. But as to our inclinations, our desires, and endeavours, our pursuing these ends and purposes, and seeking to be conformable to the divine will, as much as is possible and consistent with this frail state, and our serious repentance when we fall short of these characters ; this is what I aim at. And it is evident, by what our Saviour says, that our righteousness must be of such a character and such a kind : and we must aspire after higher and higher degrees of holiness ; we must labour to walk more and more conformably to the will of
God,

God, thro'out the whole course of our conversations.

I should come now to the last thing : and my business would be to shew you, if I had time, how necessary this is to our *entring into the kingdom of heaven* ; how necessary it is to be holy, thus strictly and sincerely holy, if ever we would *enter into the kingdom of God*. This is a matter of very great consequence, and furnishes us with an extraordinary motive to holiness, if the necessity hereof be cleared up and made manifest. But since the time will not allow me to do this at present, I shall refer it to another season : and, in the mean time, take that for granted, which I design, if it please God, more largely to prove and demonstrate to you ; that there is no *entring into the kingdom of God* without being strictly holy. What hath been said, however, shews ;

1. Of how great consequence our Saviour's coming into the world was ; not only on the account of the sufferings he was to undergo to reconcile us to God, and the excellent example he was to set before men, to shew them the way of holiness and purity ; but on the account of his excellent doctrine, so happily design'd to disabuse the ignorant world, which was led by those indeed who pretended to much piety, but had it not. In what a miserable state was the church of the Jews at this time ; when
the

the brightest patterns, and the most excellent examples they had, fell short of a righteousness which was so necessary to make a good man, and an inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven? Oh! how necessary was our Saviour's presence in the world, to undeceive men upon such an occasion as this was; when they were so universally corrupted, and their false glosses had so clouded the spirituality of the law of God, and hid it from the common people?

2. How does this demonstrate the truth, purity, and excellency of the christian religion? Certainly that religion is best which is most becoming God, which promotes holiness the most strictly. This is a proof that Christianity is true; and that our Lord Jesus, the author of the true religion, was the true Messias. A wicked man, an impostor, could never have taught at such a rate as this; and have excell'd all who went before him in his doctrine, as well as outshin'd them all in the exemplary pattern he set. He was *without sin; no guile was ever found in his mouth* ⁿ.

3. Let what hath been said make us all examine our own hearts, and consider whether we pretend to holiness or not. If we do; let us see whether we are Pharisaical pretenders only; or whether we have that true and genuine purity, that holiness of heart

and life, which our Saviour requires. Let us compare our lives with the law of God, and Christ's explication of it: let us see the spirituality of that law, and consider how great and important a thing it is to be truly a christian. How should we spend our time, and improve all the talents which we enjoy, for the advancement of this work of holiness upon our souls, if we are christians indeed? And, if we are not; how should this awaken us to a sense of our danger? What will become of the vain hypocritical pretenders to holiness; of those whose righteousness is but like that of *the Scribes and Pharisees*; who make a shew of religion, but have it not in their hearts; who pretend to love God, but in their works it appears they deny him; who say they will conform themselves to the divine law, and yet it appears that they walk contrary to it, in the course of their conversations, in many instances? What will become of profane persons; and what will become of the hypocritical? The profane do not so much as pretend to a righteousness *like that of the Scribes and Pharisees*; therefore they can have no hope: and, as for the hypocrite; what is his hope, but *as the spider's web*? *The hope of the hypocrite shall perish*°. As for those who are sincere, whose main aim and desire is after holiness, whose souls have

• Job 8. 13, 14.

a true relish of spiritual things, who desire nothing so much as to be holy, and the remainder of whose corruptions gives them the principal trouble they endure; these are good evidences that they fall not under the character of hypocrites. As for those who say, *Lord, what I know not, teach thou me; and wherein I have done evil, I will do so no more*^p; who are sensible of their own defects, and constantly implore his grace, and who pray as sincerely that they may be holy, as that they may be happy; that they may be made *meet for the kingdom of God*^q, as that they may *enter therein*: these are truly religious; these are true candidates of glory. These are *running the race that is set before them*^r; at the end of which is a reward of eternal life. These are they who *ask, and shall receive; seek, and shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto them*^s. Their petitions for more grace, and victory over sin, shall be answered. And tho sometimes their sorrows are great, for want of a more perfect conformity to the rule of God's word, in various instances; yet *blessed are they that mourn now*, who mourn after that manner on the account of their sins, *for they shall be comforted*^s. Tho now their desires are importunate, and they are uneasy because they cannot see *Christ formed in them* as they

^p Job 34. 32.^q Col. 1. 12.^r Heb. 12. 1.^s Luke 11. 9, 10.^s Mat. 5. 4.

would do ; yet *blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*^t. Tho their consciences are agitated on the account of their transgressing the laws of God in various instances ; yet there is a foundation of calmness, joy, and peace of conscience laid for them. They are tender, and they tremble at God's word : they are in the way to be purified, and made more and more holy.

As for those who walk strictly with God, and have been assisted by his grace, so as that tho they have reason to humble themselves daily for their defects, yet they have not been suffered to slip into any more than common frailties and infirmities ; *upon whose tabernacles the light of God's candle shines, so that by his light they walk thro' darkness*^u ; in whose heart reigns *the peace of God, which passes all understanding* ; and who in believing rejoice, *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*^v ; who can triumph, with the apostle, in the grace of God, tho they confess that they could not be able to do this of themselves ; oh ! how much is it their interest to *walk humbly with God*^w, lest their consciences be wounded, their peace and joy interrupted ; lest clouds and darkness interpose between their souls and heaven, and they be left in such a condition as may expose them to temptations ? It is our highest interest, not

^t Mat. 5. 6.

^u Job 29. 3, 4.

^v 1 Pet. 1. 8.

^w Micah 6. 8.

only in regard of the glory of the kingdom of heaven into which we may expect to enter if we are truly holy ; but it is our highest interest in regard of the foretaste of that glory, and the peace of conscience that we shall reap in this world while we are here ; our highest interest to take care *what manner of persons we be, in all holy conversation and godliness* *.

Let what hath been said, therefore, have its proper and awful influence upon our minds : for it is certain, *that except our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And our Saviour supposes and intimates, that if it does, in such a manner, exceed the righteousness of those he reprove, so as that it carries in it contrary characters to theirs ; we shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Let this encourage our steadiness and constancy ; our strict and circumspect walk. Let us *labour abundantly in the work of the Lord ; be steadfast, and unmoveable therein : knowing that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord* †.

* 2 Pet. 3. 11.

† 1 Cor. 15. 58.





SERMON VII.

Preach'd at

PINNER-S-HALL, May 12, 1705.

MATT. V. 20.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The third SERMON on this text.



YOU have been before informed that the design of our Saviour in this sermon pronounced upon the mount, and contain'd in this, and the two following chapters, was to vindicate the divine law from the false interpretations and misconstructions put upon it by the Scribes and Pharisees; and to explain to the people the spirituality, and due extent, and obligation, and duration, of that holy law which is contain'd in the ten commandments. For it is of the moral

moral law that our Saviour discourses, and several branches of which he explains largely in this sermon. In the words immediately before our text, he shews the danger of persons acting contrary to, or teaching others to transgress, any one of the least of those precepts; for, indeed, they are all of great consequence: he says, *such shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth, and teacheth them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* For, our Lord Jesus had before shewn, that great rewards would attend a sincere regard to religion and holiness, in pronouncing those blessings which are mentioned in the beginning of this sermon. But it is not enough to shew men what will be the excellent consequence of true religion: our Lord would also explain to them wherein true religion and holiness consists; that they might not amuse themselves with vain appearances, and imagine they were in the way to happiness, when they had not learnt what true holiness meant. And because they depended much upon, and were in danger to be corrupted by, the doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees; our Lord Jesus here very plainly declared himself to his disciples, and the rest of the people that attended to his doctrine, that *unless their righteousness exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* As to the form of his speech, it is

very authoritative, and signifies the importance of what he taught. *Verily I say unto you* : that is, take notice of it ; I expressly tell you of this matter, and lay it before you, as a warning, that you deceive not yourselves ; *unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* For the explication of these words, I proposed to shew you ;

- I. What is meant by *the kingdom of heaven.*
- II. What kind of people these *Scribes and Pharisees* were.
- III. What was *the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*, with which our Saviour finds so much fault, and of which he speaks as very defective.
- IV. What kind of righteousness that is, which is requisite to *entering into the kingdom of heaven* ; and, without which, it is not possible to enter.
- V. How it appears that it is impossible for any one to *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, who hath not that righteousness which our Saviour speaks of ; a *righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees.*

I have proved to you, in the 1st place, that tho *the kingdom of heaven* often signifies the gospel-state of the New Testament ;

ment; yet, in this place, it must signify the kingdom of glory, and not the kingdom of grace precisely.

I have shewn you, in the 2d place, that these Scribes and Pharisees were persons of the most eminent account among the Jews for piety and holiness, at the time when our Saviour appeared upon the earth. The Scribes were certain officers that were conversant in the law of God: and, as they made it their study, so they professed to explain it to the people, and to conform themselves to it. The Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews; who had the greatest reputation among them for holiness: and of these many were Scribes. Now this is a very awful consideration, that our Saviour should speak thus of those who were distinguish'd from the rest for piety amongst the Jews; that unless the righteousness of his followers exceeded theirs, *they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

In the 3d place, I have shewn you, what this *righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* was, which our Saviour charges with so great defects, that without a better righteousness there is no entering the kingdom of heaven. I have shewn you this righteousness on its bright, and on its dark side. Upon its bright side: that the Scribes and Pharisees, especially the Pharisees, and those Scribes who were of their sect, were greatly esteemed among the people for the strictness

of their conversations, in various respects ; and for the purity of their doctrine too. For the purity of their doctrine : they held the resurrection of the body, the existence of angels and spirits, and the immortality of the soul ; which are some of the main principles upon which religion is founded, and from whence are derived the greatest motives to engage men to holiness and purity : that they were famous for their attention on divine worship ; for the appearing fervency of their prayers ; for their alms-deeds, which, it seems, were done by them liberally, to a considerable number of people. Famous they were for their strictness in matters of piety and justice, in that they would not omit *tithing mint, anise, and cummin* : so zealous seemed they to be for promoting and upholding the worship of God ; and made so great a pretence to the most exact justice. In short, it appears, that in regard of piety towards God, and charity and justice towards men, as well as in respect of their temperate and abstemious manner of life, and the professed circumspection of their walk, they were persons of great eminency : and yet *their righteousness*, it seems, was not sufficient to introduce them *into the kingdom of heaven*.

For, on the other side, we have observed to you, that notwithstanding this fair appearance, generally speaking, these people had

had great defects and blemishes in their righteousness. They were partial in the law of God ; having respect to some things, when they undervalued others. They were superficial : for they seemed to have a greater regard to lesser things, such as *tithing of mint, anise, and cummin*, than to those of greater importance ; such as *judgment, mercy, and faith*, the greater matters of the law. They were superstitious : and, while they observed God's law materially, they mixed their own traditions with the commands of God ; *and made void the law of God by their own traditions*. They were hypocritical, besides ; and made much greater pretence to religion than was proper for them, considering they had so slight and slender a regard to the main essentials of it. And then, they were vain-glorious : and those duties which were materially good, those actions of theirs which seemed to be the best, were spoiled by the perverse and untoward disposition of their minds ; they setting such a high value upon them, as if the Almighty were beholden to them for their services ; or as if they were capable of meriting thereby.

I have also shewn you, in the 4th place, what that righteousness is, that must *exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees* ; and, *without which we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*. I have shewn you there is a twofold righteousness requisite to our entrance into that glorious kingdom ; a

righteousness by which we must be justified, and a righteousness whereby we must be sanctified. That righteousness by which we must be justified, is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; which we must apprehend by faith. That whereby we are sanctified, is an inherent righteousness, wrought in us by the spirit of God; whereby we are regenerated, and become *new creatures*; whereby sin is mortified, and grace implanted, and nourished, and made to grow in our souls: and, without this, *we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*. I have shewn you that this latter is the righteousness meant in our text. For, tho it is true, that none can enter into the kingdom of heaven but such as have the righteousness of Christ; yet this is not the doctrine concerned in this text, tho it is in divers others. And I think I have proved to you, by many undeniable arguments, that the righteousness the text means, is a righteousness of sanctification. We must be holy by a righteousness inherent in us, and exercised in our lives, beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees; or else we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The design of our Saviour, in this sermon, and particularly in this verse, appears to be this; that he is speaking of a moral righteousness and holiness: and, if he had not been speaking of that, he needed not have said *our righteousness must exceed that*
of

of the Scribes and Pharisees; or else we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. For, if he means the righteousness of justification; it must not only exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, but that of the greatest saints who ever were in the world.

Having given you this brief recapitulation, I come now to the last thing I proposed to consider:

V. The impossibility of entering into the kingdom of heaven without such a holiness as that which we have been speaking of; a holiness, or righteousness, which *exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees*; true, sincere, genuine, internal holiness, and purity; a principle of holiness that must prevail, and govern a person in the course of his conversation. *Tho there is not a just man upon earth that doth good, and sinneth not²*; yet none but such as *mortify the deeds of the body*, whose souls are governed by a principle of holiness, who walk holily before God, *can enter into the kingdom of heaven.* It must be a sincere, hearty, holy, and internal principle which must govern men, in opposition to that partial, hypocritical, vain-glorious, and superficial holiness to which the Pharisees aspired; and which they thought was so excellent, that it was sufficient to introduce them into glory. Christianity

² Eccles. 7. 20.

teaches us another thing ; explains to us the law of God, and shews us our obligation to another manner of holiness than they could justly pretend to. This may be proved to you many ways ; that it is necessary we should have a true, sincere, genuine, prevailing principle of holiness in us, or else *we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

1. It will appear from the nature of God : the nature of that God who hath the keys of hell and death, and of heaven and glory too ; who is the sovereign judge and governour of the world, and disposes of all persons as he pleases ; who dispenses rewards and punishments, according to the rules of wisdom and justice. It is inconsistent with the nature of God, it is inconsistent with the divine perfections, to make a man who is in a state of sin, a person who is ungodly and unholy, to make him happy and glorious. It is true, those who were once sinners, once ungodly and unholy, may be made holy : but I speak now of making persons happy and glorious, who remain in a state of unholiness and ungodliness ; this is inconsistent with the divine nature. If we will consult the idea we have of God as a being infinitely perfect ; or if we will consult what the scriptures declare concerning his essential attributes ; this will appear as clear as can be, that there is an absolute contrariety betwixt God and sin, if we account God to be holy. And if we do not,
we

we take from him his greatest perfection ; we remove that from him which is necessary to consider, if we will allow him to be God. If he is God, he is infinitely perfect : and if he is infinitely perfect, he hath this perfection of holiness. The scripture declares he is *holy* ; *glorious in holiness* ^a. The holy penmen take an extraordinary pleasure in representing him as holy. The holy angels cry, *Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty* ; in Isa. 6. And in Rev. 4. we have the same acclamation and ascription of holiness to him. And in some Greek copies it is nine times pronounced, instead of three. All this shews how inseparable this attribute is from the divine Being. And if God be holy, infinitely holy ; then he hath an infinite aversion to sin ; he hates it with an irreconcilable hatred. Sin must be as opposite to him, to his holy nature, as darkness is opposite to light. There can be no agreement betwixt infinite holiness and sin. And, if so ; then it must be natural to him accordingly to execute justice. If he be infinitely holy ; why then he will reward holiness, and punish sin. If he have such a love to holiness, he will shew it by rewarding of it ; and if he have such an aversion to sin, he will shew that : and how should he shew his aversion to sin, better than by his punishing of it ? and his love to

^a Exod. 15. 11.

holiness, but by rewarding of it? *The righteous God loveth righteousness, and will reward it.* So it is as plain and easy to infer, that seeing he hath an infinite aversion to sin, he will punish iniquity. *The wicked shall not dwell with him: the ungodly shall not tarry in his sight^b.* He will rain fire and brimstone upon them^c. The scripture does abundantly declare God's hatred of sin: it is *the abominable thing which he hates^d.* *If the wicked turn not, God will whet his glittering sword, and his hand will take hold on judgment; and he will render vengeance to them for their transgressions^e.* So that nothing is more plain and evident, from the justice and holiness of God, than that, as he hath an aversion to sin, he will punish it, and not reward it.

Now if it were possible for men, in a state of sin, to enjoy the happiness of heaven; this would be for God to act contrary to himself, contrary to his own nature, and to shew his love and complacency to those persons who are quite averse to him; his enemies, and such as remain in a state of enmity. This were for him to abandon the rites of justice, and to overthrow his authority, as he is governour of the world. This would be to take away the difference betwixt good and evil; and would overturn, at once, the esteem which we ought to

^b Psal. 5. 5.^c Psal. 11. 6.^d Jer. 44. 4.^e Deut. 32. 41.

have

have of the divine perfections. And it is easy to see this would reflect as much upon his wisdom, as upon his holiness and justice. Where would be his wisdom? For, seeing his way, in the government of the world, is according to the methods of wisdom; we find rewards and punishments, threatnings and promises, are made use of by God as the great instruments of his government. But what would all these signify, if the wicked might enter into a state of glory? If those who are but hypocrites, like the Scribes and Pharisees, might *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, and persons might be partakers of that blessedness, without having holiness for the predominant principle in their souls; then where would be the wisdom, as well as the justice, of the divine government? It were easy to enlarge upon this head; and to shew you the same thing from the veracity of God: but this would lead me too far. Besides, the next thing we have to consider, will farther shew this: that as it must be thus with respect to the divine nature; so,

2. It appears from the declaration of the divine will, that those shall not enter heaven who are not truly righteous: God having so constituted and established this matter, as to declare his mind aloud in his word about it. And who knows his designs, so well as himself? Will any man presume on a title to heaven, and walk in

a state of sin, when God hath declared, in his word, that the wicked shall never enjoy that glory, and that *no unclean thing shall enter there*^f; and when those who live and *die in their sins*, are expressly declared to be excluded entrance into the kingdom of heaven; and when we are assured that they *shall have their portion in a place where the worm never dies, and where the fire shall never be quenched*^g? How vain then is it for any to pretend he hath a title to glory, when God, who gives life and death, distributes rewards and punishments as he pleases, hath declared the contrary? His holy law expressly awards *death as the wages of sin*^h: and death signifies eternal death, as well as temporal. He hath declared his hatred of the wicked; that *he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest upon them*; and that *this shall be the portion of their cup*ⁱ: he hath declared, that *he is angry with the wicked every day*^k: he hath declared, that *it is a terrible thing to fall into his hands*^l; and that *none can stand before him when once he is angry*: that *tribulation, anguish, and wrath, are the portion of them that do evil*^m: that *the righteous judgment of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness*ⁿ. And this he hath

^f Rev. 21. 27.

^g Mark 9. 44.

^h Rom. 6. 23.

ⁱ Psal. 11. 6.

^k Psal. 7. 11.

^l Heb. 10. 31.

^m Rom. 2. 9.

ⁿ Chap. I. 17, 18.

declared

declared by terrible instances of his judgment, as well as by the sanction of his law. He hath left strange monuments in the world of his hatred against sin. Death, in so many instances as there have been persons in former generations, shews that sin is an evil thing indeed : seeing death is the worst of evils, except moral evil, which is the evil of sin itself. The destruction of cities and nations ; the dreadful monuments of divine vengeance in the ruin of the old world, in the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the inhabitants thereof, by fire from heaven ; the calamities which have infested the earth ever since ; the evils which attend mankind ; the vanity and vexation of spirit ; the diseases, the pains, and torments, which men endure in their bodies ; and the remorse of conscience that is sometimes so intolerable to their minds ; these all declare the severity of God's righteous law, and that he hath an unalterable hatred to sin.

3. Not only the divine law declares this, and God hath said and constituted it, that punishment shall be the effect of sin, and that those shall not be happy, who have not a substantial holiness and purity : but there is no provision made for the entrance of any un sanctified persons into the kingdom of heaven ; no provision made in the gospel, which is the method of grace, and reconciliation. Man indeed may say, that tho the law is severe, and denounces death as

the wages of sin, yet *the gift of God is eternal life, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*°. It is very true: but God hath no where declared, that any unholy thing shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: he hath no where declar'd that he will lay aside his holiness and justice, that he may display his mercy. For, in the gospel, *mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other*°. God hath so ordered the dispensation of the gospel of grace, that there shall be no infringement of his own perfections: there is nothing derogatory to the attributes of his justice, and holiness, in the method of salvation. Nay, not only hath he so ordered the matter in the gospel, that these attributes of his should be secured; but they are more eminently declared than they were in any former dispensation: there is a plainer, a more open and explicit, and terrible denunciation of judgments against the wicked in the gospel, than there was under the dispensation of the law. The punishments threatned there, were principally temporal evils: and tho there were some which reached the eternal state, yet they were not so plainly declared, and so frequently denounced, as now under the gospel. Who, that reads what our Saviour says of *a worm that never dies, and a fire that never shall be quenched*°; of a place, or state, where there

° Rom. 6. 23.

P Psal. 85. 10.

° Mark 9. 44.

is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth^r; who that considers what the apostles declare in their writings of *Christ's coming in flaming-fire to take vengeance upon his enemies^t*; and of *that blackness of darkness which is reserved for ever^t for the punishment of sin*; of that terrible day of the Lord, wherein he will render unto every man according to his deeds^u, and cast those into irretrievable misery, into the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death^v, who remain in a state of sin: who, I say, can read these things, and pretend that the gospel gives any countenance to vice; and that after all these terrible sentences it shall be counted possible for men, with their sins, to enter into the kingdom of heaven? Without holiness no man shall see the Lord^w. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God^x; as our Saviour declares in this chapter. Be not deceived, God will not be mocked: as a man soweth, so shall he reap^y. There is therefore no provision made in the gospel to relieve those who live and die in their sins.

It is true, God is said to *justify the ungodly^z*: but the apostle himself sufficiently explains what he means; viz. that God justifies those who were formerly ungodly,

^r Mat. 8. 12.

^s 2 Thess. 1. 8.

^t Jude 13.

^u Rom. 2. 6.

^v Rev. 21. 8.

^w Heb. 12. 14.

^x Mat. 5. 8.

^y Gal. 6. 7.

^z Rom. 5. 4.

and in a state of sin, previous to this state of justification. But we must not conceive they are in an ungodly state, and justified at the same time : for that is as contrary as light is to darkness. If we are in a vicious state, and that which determines and governs our soul is a principle of vice, which is directly contrary to the divine nature and holy law of God ; how can there be a reconciliation betwixt God and us, a reconciliation at the same time that we are perpetrating those things which are evil in his sight ? Therefore that text must be understood after the same manner as the message which Christ sent to John : *Go, tell him, says our Lord, that the blind see ; the lame walk ; and the dead are raised*^a. *The blind see, &c.* None are so foolish as to imagine that they saw while they were blind ; or that they walked while they were, by lameness, unable to walk : but the plain meaning is, that whereas before they were blind, and could not see ; lame, and could not walk ; now they were healed by the miraculous power of our Saviour, and could see, and walk. So *the ungodly are justified* : they are not ungodly now they are in a justified state ; tho they were ungodly, they are now justified. *Such were some of you*, says the apostle to the Corinthians, after having enumerated some of the greatest of sinners :

^a Mat. II. 5.

but

but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God^b. Our Lord Jesus, who is the Mediator of the new covenant, never came to *save men* in their sins, but *from their sins*. *He shall be called Jesus*, says the angel, *because he shall save his people from their sins*^c. The whole œconomy of the gospel aims at this: the precepts of our Saviour, the strictness of the morals prescribed in the gospel, declare this: the extraordinary motives, the declarations which are made of the heavenly state; the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was *a lamb without spot and blemish*^d; the patterns of the apostles, and their constant exhortations to the people; all declare, that there is nothing more contrary to the gospel of the grace of God than sin. The grace of God that bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world^e. It was the very design of our Saviour's death, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works^f. The effusion of his blood was for this end. This was one great reason of it; to merit grace for us, by which we might be sanctified.

^b 1 Cor. 6. 11.^c Mat. 1. 21.^d 1 Pet. 1. 19.^e Titus 2. 12.^f Ver. 13, 14.

So that there is no provision made for any man's entrance into the kingdom of heaven without holiness: not by the gospel, as merciful a dispensation as it is. Therefore, if the law of God will not give us way no more than his attributes; nor the gospel itself make us a way to heaven without holiness; who, that lives in sin, shall pretend to it? Nor is it to be imagined, that after this state there will be any means afforded to make us holy: there is no gospel, no mediation, no sacrifice hereafter for sin. Henceforth *there remains no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*^g. *There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither we are going*^h. Nor can the soul that is fixed in its state, immediately upon leaving its body, be removed from it. It appears from the parable of the rich man, when he dies, he is represented as in a state of torment: and, notwithstanding all his desires and intreaties, he is so far from being able to leave that place of torment, that he can obtain nothing to mitigate his sorrows and miseries; not *one drop of water to cool his tongue*ⁱ. There is no space for repentance in the other world. And if persons

^g Heb. 10. 26, 27.

^h Eccles. 9. 10.

ⁱ Luke 16. 24.

are not godly in this world ; as it is impossible they should enter into the kingdom of heaven in an ungodly state, so there is no provision made that they should ever be changed in the other world. Besides : the mediatory kingdom of our Lord Jesus, as that is a mediation to reconcile and make peace betwixt God and sinners, is determined, *when he hath gathered his elect to himself from all the corners of the world^k*, and comes to judgment. There is no more mediation of reconciliation then : he *gives up the kingdom to his Father*, that is, his mediatory kingdom, on that account ; as it is expressed in 1 Cor. 15. 24.

4. It will farther appear that it is impossible for a person who is not holy *to enter into the kingdom of God*, if we consider what is meant by *entering into the kingdom of God* ; which is, to be happy, and to be glorious. A wicked man, one who is in a state of sin, and so remains, must be altogether unfit for the society of that place. Rational creatures are made for society ; and man cannot be happy without society : and the happiness of heaven principally consists in society with God ; by having communion with him, having the manifestation of his favour, the intimations of his kindness. Society with our Lord Jesus Christ, will likewise be a great part of the happiness of

^k Mat. 24. 31.

that state: for, tho he is God, yet hath he human nature in the glorified state; whereby we may be rendred more capable of intimate converse with him, and of discerning the divine glory, as it shines in the face of the Son of God, who is also the son of man. The society likewise of angels, and saints; how is it possible that a person who is ungodly, should be happy in this society? *How can two walk together, unless they are agreed*¹? How can one who loves sin and delights in it, be happy in communion with God, who hates and abhors it? This is a contradiction in itself. To be happy in the communion of God, must be to be happy in the contemplation of his perfections. But that contemplation would be an uneasiness, a trouble, a disturbance, and a terrible wound to an un sanctified soul. If he were to have society with God, to converse with him, when he should find him to be infinitely holy, to be just, to be true, and faithful, and naturally and necessarily to hate sin, and at the same time find himself polluted by it; what disturbance would this give him? Every creature loves himself, and hath a natural desire to his own happiness, and must have an aversion to that which is contrary to him. Therefore the sinner hath an aversion to God, because he is infinitely holy; he hath

¹ Amos 3. 3.

an averſion to God's juſtice and holineſs, becauſe he is afraid of being puniſhed : and he would eſcape the puniſhment and righteous judgment which God hath awarded to ſin. Is it poſſible he ſhould delight in the ſociety of ſaints and angels, and find a happineſs therein, who are contrary to him ? The wicked in this world are irritated, ſo as to perſecute the ſaints. And if they are in the company of the righteous, eſpecially if they are exerciſing acts of piety and holineſs ; their converſation is ſuch a reproach to them, that it is a wound upon their minds. As the *righteous ſouls* of the godly *are vexed with the filthy communication of the wicked*^m ; ſo the unrighteous ſouls of the wicked are vexed at the holineſs they ſee in the righteous, when thoſe acts of holineſs do ſo^e manifeſtly reproach their converſation, and are ſo many reproofs and rebukes to them for walking after another manner.

Befides ſome other reaſons which determine the wicked to hate the righteous, it is enough if we conſider that there muſt be an agreement in diſpoſition and temper of mind, or elſe two perſons can never be happy in the ſociety of each other : and a moral difference is the greateſt that can be betwixt two perſons. The difference betwixt ſin and holineſs, is the moſt diſtin-

^m 2 Pet. 2. 7.

guishing difference that can be. If there be true piety and holiness, men may have some comfort in conversing with one another, notwithstanding their disagreeableness in some other respects : but when there is a moral difference between them, the one being holy, and the other unholy ; how can there be an agreeable conversation ? How then shall the ungodly *enter into the kingdom of heaven* ; and after having passed their life in a course of sin here, enter into a state of so much holiness hereafter ? How can they be happy in the society of those who are of a quite contrary temper and genius ; who love that which they hate, and hate that which they love ? It is impossible, a society so formed, should be happy in one another.

5. This farther appears from the employment, and business of heaven. Persons who *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, do not enter there to enjoy an Epicurean sensual pleasure ; to spend an eternity in a supine negligence, laziness, and inactivity : no ; there is an employment, an uninterrupted employment and business in the state of glory ; and, without this, the happiness could not be so great as it is represented. There will be nothing in that world to tire or discompose the blessed inhabitants : they will be never *weary of well-doing* : there will be nothing to flag their spirits, nothing to render their souls uneasy ; no infirmity of body ; no want of recruits of nature by
sleep,

sleep, or any other recreation : there will be no temptation ; no wandering of the fancy to disconcert their thoughts, or interrupt them in those acts of piety about which they shall be constantly employed to eternity. Their business will be, as is represented in the Revelation, to worship God, to praise him, and adore him. *His servants shall serve him* : and it is said, they shall *serve him day and night* ^a ; that is, continually : for, *there shall be no night there* ^o. There will be an uninterrupted service to the divine majesty, and a constant ascription of honour, and glory, and dominion, to him for ever : *They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*

Now is it possible that the wicked should be made fit for such an employment as this is, while they remain in a state of sin ? To enter into heaven with a wicked frame of mind, is to enter in such a frame as is an aversion to the employment of heaven. And if the thing could be accounted possible, where would the happiness of this be ; to be always employed in that to which they bear an aversion ? It would be to suppose that they could be made happy in the performance of that wherein every act is hypocritical ; every part of their employment disagreeable to them. How do they hate

^a Rev. 7. 15.

^o Chap. 21. 25.

the worship of God now ; and how uneasy are they to attend, but a little time, the places where others serve God ? They say, with those spoken of by the prophet Malachi, that *it is vain to serve God*, and that *there is no profit in keeping his ordinances* ^p. They take no pleasure in serving of him : they have a gust for sensual delights ; but they *delight not in the knowledge of God's ways*, or in the attendance of his services. And if they are so uneasy now, in being where an hour or two is spent in the worship of God ; how uneasy would they be, if they were to pass an eternity in that society, which is always employed in worshipping and praising him, and ascribing glory to his name ?

6. As they are incapable of the happiness of heaven ; so they are incapable of the employment also. It is an intellectual happiness, a mental happiness ; a happiness which consists in the knowledge of truth, and in the love of holiness, and in the sense of God's favour. Now there is nothing more diametrically opposite to a wicked temper of mind than such a happiness as this. The wicked have most ease and happiness, if I may so express it, when they are most in error, most stupid, and when their minds are most in the dark ; that is, when their consciences are seared, then they enjoy their

^p Mal. 3. 14.

sensual delights, with the greatest gust : and this is the most dangerous condition they can be in, on this side of destruction. How can those who have their happiness in sensual delights, which they cannot enjoy to any tolerable degree till they have perverted their minds with prejudices ; how can they then enjoy that kind of happiness which is the only happiness of heaven ? Can they who delight so much in sensuality, ever account it a happiness to have their minds irradiated with the knowledge of God, whose perfections are so contrary to their dispositions ; as hath been shewn before ? Can they be capable of the joy of a good conscience, who have an evil one ? If they even now reflect upon themselves justly, and see the state of their own souls ; this will naturally give them abundance of trouble and regret. And if so ; how would this distress increase upon them in that world ? For, the state of heaven being a state of intellectual light, it will represent to every man, as in a glass, the condition of his own soul. And this would give the wicked terrible remorse and trouble, if we could suppose they were placed in that situation : for, being in that light, they must have the manifestation of the state of their own souls ; and this being evil, would make them more miserable. The saints who enjoy eternal glory and felicity, as they are in the divine light, and can see the state of
their

their consciences perfectly well, and have in themselves a conscience certainly assured that they are freed from all the stains of sin, must needs possess an unspeakable joy. A rational creature reflecting upon itself, and seeing itself transformed into the image of God, and placed in an advantageous situation of light and holiness, must needs be happy. But the mind which is not disposed hereto, must be quite otherwise, if we suppose it in that situation, and invested with knowledge sufficient to make a right judgment of itself. An ungodly soul would see its own deformity, and would be frightened at itself, and be full of remorse and terror : so impossible is it for one who is ungodly, to be capable of that kind of happiness which is to be enjoyed in heaven. It is an intellectual rational happiness, consisting in the joy of a good conscience ; in the contemplation of the divine perfections ; in the sense of the love of God, and making a return of praise to him. But how can we love God, who love sin, which is infinitely opposite to him ; or be loved of him, who live in a state of sin ; when God hath declared that he abhors the wicked, and that he is *angry with them every day* ^a ; and when sin is as contrary to his nature as darkness is to light ?

^a Psal. 7. 11.

Thus

Thus have I shewn you that it is impossible for one who is not holy to *enter into the kingdom of heaven*: that it is necessary, if a man would enter into that kingdom, for him to have a true, sincere, and substantial inherent holiness: that the very nature of God demonstrates this, and the declarations of his will in his sacred word: it is so by the constitution of his law; and there is no provision made in the gospel for the entrance of a wicked person into heaven; nor is there any provision made in the other world to change those who live and die in their sins. I have shewn that for an ungodly person to *enter into the kingdom of heaven* is impossible, because he is unfit for the company, and for the employment of that place, and incapable of that kind of happiness it affords: for, his happiness lies in sensuality, in the pleasures of sin, in earthly carnal objects, in the delight of his senses; and is not a rational internal happiness, the happiness of the mind and conscience, which is the greatest joy of heaven: such a happiness he is utterly incapable of, while he is in a state of sin.

If any one after this should ask me, how was it then with that eminent instance in the New Testament of one who was promoted to enter into paradise with Christ, tho he had lived a vicious life, the thief upon the cross; to whom our Lord Jesus Christ promised, on the day of his crucifixion,

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cifixion, that *that day he should be with him in paradise*^r: I would answer, it is true, that that person had lived a vicious life; but it is as true that he was sanctified before he entred heaven. There is no doubt to be made but he was *that day in paradise*, in a state of blis and glory; but, before he entred into it, he was converted by the grace of God, changed, and renewed. We do not deny but a person may be changed, and sanctified, a little before his death; as was the case of this eminent instance: but it is certain, that it is a very dangerous thing for any persons to defer their conversion upon a presumption that they shall be changed then. It is indeed a possible thing; but we do not find frequent instances of it in scripture. There is, we see, such a thing recorded, that no true penitent might despair: but you find not such another instance as this is; that none might vainly presume, and think it a common case, when, in reality, it is a special one. Christ, at this time, would shew an extraordinary proof of his love and tenderness to poor sinners; and was pleased to convert a very wicked person at the last hour. Now shall any one, because of this extraordinary instance at an extraordinary time, presume he shall fare after the same manner; when it is evident, that so far are people generally from being

^r Luke 23. 43.

converted when they come to die, that they are stupid, and their distemper renders them incapable of minding the great business of their souls? And it is so far from being a truth, that persons are commonly converted when they come to their death-bed, that there are few converted, if they defer it to the last part of their lives; few instances of persons in old age who ever turned to God: how unlikely is it then, that those who have lived a life of sin, till they just come to the brink of the grave, should enjoy such an advantage?

This instance, therefore, does not shock the truth we have been establishing; that no unholy person can *enter into the kingdom of heaven*: for this thief was made holy before he came there. And it is an easy matter to give you some account of his good works. He served God before he went out of the world: he gave an open testimony to the world of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he was an innocent person, and died wrongfully, when there were such multitudes who denied him. There was a discovery of his fidelity, and change of his mind, in that he owned Christ to be the true Messias: there was a proof of his faith in these words; *Lord! remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*^f. Here was faith in the true Messias: here was prayer

^f Luke 23. 42.

to him for pardoning grace and mercy ; and for an inheritance in glory. And to this may be added, that he discovered his faithfulness in reprovng the other thief who was crucified with him : I say, faithfulness in reprovng of him. He reprovng him because he reviled Christ, as well as the rest of the multitude. Here was love to Christ in this, that he could not bear to hear him affronted, even in the midst of his torments. Here was repentance. *We suffer justly*, says he ; *receiving the reward of our sins : but this person hath done nothing amiss*^s. Here was submission to the hand of God ; and an acknowledgment that he was just in exposing him to that infamous and painful punishment. You see here was a great discovery of grace in this person : so that he was truly sanctified before he entered heaven. But I need insist no longer upon this matter ; which is so clear, that methinks every one who attends to it, will easily be convinced, from the nature of the thing, as well as from the declarations of the divine word, that there is no *entring into the kingdom of heaven* without having a real, sincere, substantial, and true holiness. Let me make a few reflections, and so conclude.

1. If there be no *entrance into the kingdom of heaven* without holiness, for the various reasons which you have heard ; then this

^s Luke 23. 41.

shews

shews how mightily those persons are mistaken, who imagine men can be in a state of salvation, in a state of justification, or reconciliation, and yet remain ungodly, in a state of sin. This is to reconcile contradictions; things which are most opposite, as opposite as light and darkness. If it is impossible for any one to enter heaven without being holy, and that sin is so contrary to the nature of God, that he abhors and *hates the workers of iniquity*^t, such as are in that condition; then there is no justified state, no state of peace and reconciliation without holiness. Justification and sanctification must go together, in regard of the time. It cannot be true of any person that he is sanctified, unless he be justified; or of any person that he is justified, unless he be sanctified. If persons could be in a state of justification without being sanctified, then it would appear that God had not such an aversion to sin; for then the sinner, in his sins, might have acceptance with God, and communion with him in heaven in like manner: but the one is as false, and absurd, as the other. If we cannot *enter into the kingdom of heaven* for those reasons you have heard, without being holy; there is no enjoying communion with God in a state of grace; no being in a state of reconciliation without this change. There is no *being in Christ* without

^t Psal. 5. 5.

being a new creature ^u: this is part of the work of the spirit of God; and what was merited by our Redeemer, that we should be redeemed from our sins. It's true, there is none in this world without sin; for we are all imperfect: but every one who is truly a christian, hath grace reigning in his soul; this is the chief principle that governs him.

2. If there is no entering heaven without holiness; then this shews the excellency of holiness and purity; as it shews, on the other hand, the deformity of sin. How well would it be for us, if we could always bear in our minds just notions of sin and holiness? how incapable sin renders us of being happy; how it sets God against us; how opposite it is to the divine Being, as he is a God of righteousness and holiness, a God of wisdom and order? There is nothing so loathsome, nothing so odious in the world as sin; nothing so beautiful, and excellent, as holiness. It is holiness that renders us so like God, and capable of enjoying him, both in a state of grace and glory. It is holiness that is the greatest perfection of the divine Being; and the greatest perfection of any rational being. God is said to be *glorious in holiness* ^v: and it is holiness that sets the chiefest beauty and comeliness upon creatures. Alas! what are

^u 2 Cor. 5. 17.| ^v Exod. 15. 11.

all external appearances and qualifications ; what is all the honour and grandeur in the world, great places, abundance of wealth, rich and noble attire, &c. what are these, to set off rational creatures ? It is the beauty of the mind that recommends us to God, and renders us amiable in his eyes : and those persons who are most holy, are the most truly honourable. These have the greatest beauty ; these have the greatest lustre ; these resemble the society above ; these are like God himself, according to their degree. These bear his image ; and therefore there is a much greater glory and resplendency upon them than upon other creatures. Those who have the greatest intellectual light in this world, who are great philosophers, or have abundance of eloquence to express their minds, and charm those that hear them ; they are odious in the sight of God, if they delight not in holiness and purity. These, if they have not the stamp of the divine image, are so much the more like the devils, and evil spirits : who know much, but at the same time are destitute of all purity ; are full of malice, and all iniquity. By how much the more knowledge a man hath, if he be deformed with vice, by so much the more he is capable of doing mischief : and his punishment will be proportionably aggravated. The best things corrupted, turn into the worst.

Let us therefore get our minds duly impressed with a right sense of holiness, and sin. Let us consider that holiness is the greatest beauty, the greatest honour, the greatest treasure, the greatest excellency of a rational creature. Let us consider what reflections it will raise in our minds here; what joy, and what serenity, in a good conscience: and consider what happiness is treasured up for those who are truly holy, in the world to come; the enjoyment of God, communion with him, and with our Lord Jesus Christ; and communion with angels and saints, after the most intimate manner. This will be the reward of the righteous.

3. If those who are not holy, *shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*; this should put us upon examining ourselves: for it is a most important point. Tho you have ever so much knowledge; tho you can talk plainly and clearly of the doctrine of the christian religion, and defend the main points thereof with a great deal of skill and judgment; what will all this signify, if you are not holy? If you are not holy, your portion will be *where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*^w. Nay, *tho you give all your goods to feed the poor, and your body to be burned*^x; if you have not internal purity and sincerity in religion; if

^w Mat. 13. 42.

^x 1 Cor. 13. 3.

you are not willing to obey every precept, and to mortify every lust, and will only pick and choose what commands you like; *your righteousness* is like that of *the Scribes and Pharisees*: and you will never enter into *the kingdom of heaven* after this manner. For, tho we cannot merit heaven by our righteousness; yet it is necessary by the divine constitution, and the nature of the thing, that we should be holy, or else we cannot be happy.

Let us therefore consider the holy and extensive nature of the divine law, and the strict precepts of the gospel; and make it our business, in good earnest, to be *holy in all manner of conversation*^y; to *present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service*^z. Let us not think it a small matter to sin against God, to wound our own consciences, and to expose ourselves to eternal vengeance. Let us not despise any one duty, by saying it is small; or neglect any duty, by saying it is difficult to be performed, *there is a lion in the way, we shall be slain in the streets*^a. But let us consider, that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be which find it*^b: consider, that we must have *a more excellent righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees*, or we cannot enter into

^y 1 Pet. 1. 15.^z Rom. 12. 1.^a Prov. 26. 13.^b Mat. 7. 14.

the kingdom of God. Consider how these people were applauded for their reputed piety: and if these could not enter into heaven, let us take care that we do not deceive ourselves. We may deceive others, by a specious pretence to religion: but *God will not be mocked*; for, *whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*^c. Wherever there is a pretence of religion, look to it that there be great piety towards God, temperance, and chastity towards ourselves, and righteousness towards men. The doctrine of our text shews us, that religion is a thing which requires greater care and concern than most people imagine. Religion must run thro' the whole course of our lives: for, *if our righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

4. This shews what reason we have to attend to the duties of religion, in a particular manner; and to seek of God that grace, which alone can make us happy. What a degenerate creature is man; prone to do evil, and that continually! *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it*^d? *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may they who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well*^e. And yet we must abandon our sins, and be holy; or else we cannot enter

^c Gal. 6. 7.^d Jer. 17. 9.^e Chap. 13. 23.

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into the kingdom of heaven. What need then have we of the divine assistance? We must apply ourselves to grace; for we can do nothing of ourselves, but it's God who doth all things for us. When we consider the corruption of our nature, and the multitude of sensual objects which tempt us; when we consider that *we wrestle not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities and powers^f*, and evil spirits have a strange access to our souls, to corrupt our thoughts; we have reason to cry out, *Wretched that we are! who shall deliver us from this body of death^g?* So corrupted and polluted are we by nature! *sold under sin^h*, and *led captive by the devil at his willⁱ*. We cannot enter into heaven without being holy. And oh! what despair would ensue upon this, if God had not given *exceeding great and precious promises to help our infirmities^k*; if our Lord Jesus Christ had not merited grace for us by the effusion of his blood, and promised to send his spirit to sanctify our minds? How should we value those occasions wherein these blessings are conveyed to us? How should we value the sacred worship of God, both in publick and private? How earnest, and how importunate should we be in our prayers? How diligent in our attendance upon the word, which is the great instru-

^f Eph. 6. 12.

^g Rom. 7. 24.

^h Ver. 14.

ⁱ 2 Tim. 2. 26.

^k 2 Pet. 1. 4.

ment of sanctification? How willing to employ all opportunities which occur to us, for the advancement of so good a work upon our souls? Let us wait at the altar of God, at the posts of wisdom's door; and earnestly implore that God would make *us holy in all manner of conversation*¹; that *so an abundant entrance may be given us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*^m.

5. What an encouragement is this to holiness and purity, seeing happiness will be the consequence of it? For, as *no unclean person shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*ⁿ; so it is in this expression intimated, that those who are holy, shall enter there. And this is plainly affirm'd in other passages of scripture. Thus, Rev. 22. 14. *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in thro' the gates into the city.* i. e. blessed are they who are truly holy, who are conform'd to the image of God here; for they shall be made happy hereafter. And how great is the happiness to be enjoy'd then? What an improvement of their minds, and what a glorification of their bodies; what an eternity of delight without any cessation or interruption of it; what *joy unspeakable, and full of glory*; what *joy of a good conscience*; what comfortable reflections upon past mercies;

¹ 1 Pet. 1. 15.

^m 2 Pet. 1. 11.

ⁿ Rev. 21. 27.

and

and what a glorious view when the scene of providence shall be opened, and the divine perfections shine brightly in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ? What a happy society, to have communion with? even God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, after an intimate and uninterrupted manner! How great will be our happiness, when there shall be no sin to draw a cloud between God and us; when there shall be *no sorrow at all* to disconcert our minds; no vain thoughts to hinder our views of the divine perfections? What a happy enjoyment of the blessed society into which no sin shall enter; where no sigh or groan shall be heard; where there shall be no complaint? For, as *they shall sin no more*; so *they shall sorrow no more*, who are advanced to that state. What a happiness in the mind; what a happiness in the soul of man; a rational and intellectual happiness! What extended capacities will then be given for the reception of that joy and happiness; and what impressions of glory from the immediate presence of God, when the saints *shall see him and be like him*? How happy will they be, who *shall enter into the kingdom of God*? But, *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. What an encouragement therefore is here to be *stedfast, and immoveable, always abounding*

• 1 John 3. 2.

| • Heb. 12. 14.

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in the work of the Lord; knowing that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord¹? For in due time we shall reap, if we faint not².

¹ 1 Cor. 15. 58.

² Gal. 6. 9.



S E R-



SERMON VIII.

The unreasonableness and
folly of an indecent beha-
viour under afflictions con-
sidered.

Preach'd at

JOINERS-HALL, March 24, 1705-6.

PROV. iii. 11, 12.

*My son, despise not the chastening of the
Lord: neither be weary of his correc-
tion. For whom the Lord loveth, he
correcteth; even as a father the son,
in whom he delighteth.*

The first SERMON on this text.



MUCH is the ignorance and
weakness even of the best of
men, that they find no small
difficulty in improving those
dispensations of God's provi-
dence, which are most adapted to their
interest. Afflictions are designed of God for
our

our profit ; and it is the most usual method by which he refines and purifies the souls of men : yet how prone are good men to behave themselves indecently under them ; either by not reverencing the authority of the divine hand that afflicts them, or not considering the love, the compassion, and tenderness, which is expressed by the affliction ? Therefore the wise man in our text cautions us against such a behaviour, from the respect that we owe to God, and the confidence we ought to have not only in his wisdom, but in the goodness of his designs towards us : in telling us that we are not, on the one hand, to *despise his chastenings*, nor, on the other, to *be weary of his correction* ; because he hath the love, as well as the authority of a father ; and corrects us, if we are his people, for this very reason, that he may express his love, and shew that he delights in us.

I need not refer you to the context, to shew the design of the words of the wise man : for this book of Proverbs is made up of various maxims of wisdom and piety, which are not dependent one upon another in the delivery of them. But we may take a little notice that Solomon addresses himself here, and on other occasions in this book, to those to whom he speaks, as to children : he makes use of this appellation, *my son*, not only in the words of our text, but in many other places. As in the beginning

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ginning of the 2d, 3d, 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of Proverbs. *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, &c. My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments. My son, attend unto my wisdom, &c.* and in the 4th chapter: *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father; and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine: forsake you not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only-beloved in the sight of my mother.*

From hence it may be supposed that Solomon wrote many of these proverbs, which contained excellent morals, and politicks, for the use of his own family. And thus he may be supposed to speak to his own children; particularly in the words I last read to you: *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father; and attend to know understanding, &c. For I was my father's son, tender and only-beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also; and said unto me, let thine heart retain my words, keep my commandments, and live^f.* As a prince also; as the father of his country, he might well speak in the same terms to his people. And as philosophers commonly taught their disciples after the same manner; I mean, using the same expressions, when they gave them the precepts of wisdom and

^f Prov. 4. 1—4.

morality : so, considering Solomon's character as *the wisest of men*, he may seem to speak to others as his disciples ; to such as were willing to attend unto his wisdom. But in a special manner, as he was a prophet, and taught the precepts of the true religion, and in speaking personated God ; *a greater than Solomon is here*^s. And we have reason to suppose, from what the apostle Paul says, that God himself speaks here to good men, calling them *his children*. For the apostle, in citing this text, so interprets it ; Heb. 12. 5—8. *Ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children ; My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth ; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons : for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.* So that these words do at least chiefly regard the righteous, those whom God disdains not to call *his own children*. In the text we have two parts.

First, A caution against an indecent behaviour under affliction ; in these terms :

^s Luke 11. 31.

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord ; neither be weary of his correction.

Secondly, The argument by which this caution is enforced : *For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth ; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*

First, There is a caution given against an uncomely behaviour under affliction. And here it may be proper for us,

- I. To consider affliction under the notion of a *chastening*, or *correction* ; a *chastening of the Lord*, and *his correction*. And then,
- II. To consider what are the indecencies of carriage the wise man speaks against, under the terms of *despising*, and *being weary of the chastening and correction of God*.

I. As to the description which is given of affliction. As it regards the righteous, it is called a *chastening* or *correction*. Not but that the same term is sometimes used in the holy scripture with reference to the wicked. So the psalmist, Psal. 39. 11. *When thou with rebukes correctest man for his iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.* So speaking of man indifferently ; Psal. 94. 10. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not be correct ? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not be know ?* But the notion of *chastening* or *correction*, is such a kind of affliction

as

as is not designed for the destruction, but the reformation of the chastised persons : tho indeed there is one text where it seems to be used somewhat otherwise. Thus, Isa. 53. 5. where the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ are enumerated : *the chastisement of our peace*, it is said, *was upon him* ; and that, *with his stripes we are healed*. If that term is there designed to represent our Lord's being put to death, the word is used in a sense that is not so common. But it is probable that his scourging is there particularly meant ; as appears by what immediately follows. *The chastisement of our peace was upon him : and with his stripes we are healed. With his stripes* : for scourging among the Jews, and other nations, was termed and accounted a punishment for correction, in order to work a reformation. So that if we interpret the words precisely to signify our Lord's scourging ; then the notion we gave before of chastisement, still continues the same.

It hath been used sometimes to express the punishment inflicted by lords upon their vassals ; sometimes by magistrates upon their subjects ; and sometimes by parents upon their children. Thus when lords punish their vassals, they are not to be supposed to design the destruction of them ; because of the advantage they reap from their service. And when magistrates punish their subjects, except in capital cases, one considerable end
is

is for the reformation of the person ; tho the greatest design is for the good of the community. Then the inflicting of punishments by parents upon their children, must certainly be for their reformation ; to turn them from any vicious course. According to the illustration taken from the close of our text, it is a great instance of a parent's love. For how much the more regularly the parent loves the child, by so much the more careful he will be to correct him for his vices.

In our text, you see the allusion is taken from the correction used by a father to his disobedient child. And indeed this most resembles the afflictive measures which God uses for the reformation of his children. If we take it in a large sense, as he is said to *correct the heathen*, as he is the great Lord and governour of the world, the sovereign of the universe ; he chastises men in general. But then he does it rather as a magistrate, than as a parent. When a lord corrects his vassals, it is not so much for their good as for his own advantage. And when a magistrate corrects his subjects, it is not so much for the advantage of the persons corrected, as it is for the benefit of the community. But when a father corrects his son, his design is terminated upon his advantage : he corrects him, because he loves him ; and because he loves him, he designs to make him better by it. When

God corrects the wicked as a governour, sometimes there is much greater advantage to the community, than to the person corrected. The *wicked will do wickedly*^t: they remain obstinate and impenitent frequently, notwithstanding the punishments inflicted upon them. But then there are others who *bear and fear*^u, and reform themselves, by seeing the punishments which are inflicted upon those who behave themselves obstinately and impenitently under them. It is true, there is a design of good when God corrects, even as a governour; a design of good to the person corrected. Thus he himself has sufficiently declared, Ezek. 33. 11. *As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways.* He does not destroy them at once as they deserve, and plunge them into everlasting misery in a moment; but he waits to be gracious, and inflicts lesser punishments for their sins, in order to bring them to repentance. And thus a father corrects his rebellious children, in order to reclaim them. But by *chastisement* in our text, we are to understand the corrections which God makes use of for the reformation of those whom he is pleased, in a peculiar sense, to call *his children*; the afflictions with which he exercises good men:

^t Dan. 12. 10.| ^u Deut. 13. 11.

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tho the scripture, in other places, as I have observed, speaks more largely of correction.

God is considered, in our text, as a father who loves his children, and delights in them. There is indeed a love of good-will, even to the wicked: but there is a love of delight and complacency, which God expresses to his own people. *He delights in them*: which cannot be applied to the wicked. Therefore we shall, in a special manner, consider his correction with reference to his own people. *He speaks to them here as to children*; as the apostle tells us: *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord; nor faint when thou art rebuked of him* ^v. So that whatever punishments are inflicted upon good men in this world, they are all to be interpreted as the corrections of a father. I do not scruple to call them punishments, and to say, that God is sometimes angry with his people; how much soever some are afraid of these terms. It is true, that God's design in correcting his people, is not thereby to satisfy his justice: but yet, all the evils and miseries which we are under in this world, may very well be termed punishments. When God speaks to his own people, he says: *You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities* ^w.

^v Heb. 12. 5.

| ^w Amos 3. 2.

And God is said to have been *angry with Moses*. He was *angry with Moses for the people's-sakes: so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips* ^x. Nor do I scruple to say, that whenever God inflicts any punishment upon his people, it is for their sins.

Some men nicely distinguish between the corrections of the divine hand. They say God sometimes inflicts troubles upon his people only for the exercise of their graces, and not at all on the account of their sins. But it would be very hard to prove this, unless we could find people so good and perfect, that they were clear from sin. It is certain there had never been any misery in the world, nor punishment, if it had not been for sin: and as soon as any good man hath a release from sin, he shall have an immunity from sorrow and trouble. Besides, there is no ground for the distinction. If we consider God sometimes only as afflicting men for the exercise of their grace, it will appear to involve thus much in it; that it is for the punishment of their sins. For, God does not try the graces of his people because he would know to what a degree of grace they are arriv'd; he knows that perfectly well: but, when he tries them, there is an allusion to putting metal into the fire for purification. This is his design; *to chastise us for our profit, that*

^x Psal. 106. 32, 33.

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we might be made partakers of his holiness^y.

Now if it be to purify us, to advance the graces in our minds, that is, to make us love him more, trust in him more, be more submissive to his divine will, patient and meek under sufferings; then this is to purify us from contrary vices, to purge us from unbelief and diffidence, from our pride and obstinacy, from our impatience, and other vices, which are contrary to the virtues and graces which are said to be tried.

And no greater instance can be given concerning what I am speaking of, than that of Job, and the apostle Paul. Job is spoken of as *a perfect man*; a man of great integrity, piety, and sincerity: yet God was pleased to afflict him after an extraordinary manner. But it is certain this was for the purifying of his soul from sin; and this was the good effect of his affliction. Therefore we find, at the close of his troubles, he humbled himself before God, and expressed himself after this manner: *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*^z. The design of these afflictions was to work Job up to a high degree of repentance: and, if he was to be brought to repentance, this supposes there was sin to be purged from him. As for the afflictions of the apostle

^y Heb. 12. 10.

| ^z Job 42. 5, 6.

Paul ; his indeed were great and numerous ; and he describes them after a pathetick manner, upon several occasions. But when he was extremely tempted, as he had occasion to recur to the grace of God, and had this answer, *My grace is sufficient for thee* ; so he declared *he would rejoice in his infirmities and temptations, because when he was weak, then he was strong*^a. He found there was an improvement of grace, and mortification of sin, when he was weak, and most humble : then he gain'd the greatest strength and advantage in the christian graces and virtues. And you find there is none speaks more humbly of himself than this apostle. Therefore we must conclude, that whatever corrections God is pleased to make use of, they are all design'd to reclaim us from sin. *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged : and this is all the fruit to take away his sin*^b. I proceed,

II. To consider what is meant by *despising the chastening of the Lord* ; and what by *being weary of his correction*. These terms, every one may easily observe, do comprehend various degrees. There is no good man who intirely *despises the chastening of the Lord*, or is intirely *weary of his correction*. Notwithstanding the thoughtfulness and inconsideration of good men sometimes

^a 2 Cor. 12. 9, 10.

| ^b Isa. 27. 9.

when

when they are corrected, they do not deliberately contemn and *despise God's correction*. And however sometimes they may be ready to distrust him, and complain of afflictions when they seem very severe; yet they are not so *weary of his correction* as to renounce their obedience, as the wicked do: I mean, not to the same degree. But it is good for us to number the several degrees wherein we may be said to offend in these points; in *despising the chastening of the Lord*, or being offended at his rebukes. For the first of these, the caution seems to be directed against a stupid and negligent behaviour; and the latter, against an impatient and murmuring frame of mind, when we are under the afflicting hand of God. For we are apt, on the one hand, not to take a sufficient notice of afflictions which we are under, so as to behave ourselves with an awful respect to the hand that afflicts us; or else we are, on the other, prone, when the affliction is very severe, to be so sensible of the pain we are under, as to forget the gracious and good designs which God hath in punishing us after this manner, so as to be *weary and faint* under the affliction; to give up our hope, and to take such methods as are contrary to our duty, to get rid of the affliction.

I. We are not to *despise the chastening of the Lord*. And here we may observe,

(1.) That the greatest degree of *despising the chastening of the Lord* is when men, with an insolent contempt, deny the providence of God; and will take no notice of his chastenings, tho they are very severe and terrible. Thus the plagues which came upon Egypt for a while before those people were destroyed, were to be accounted so many *chastenings* and *corrections* which God was pleased to use towards them; and which, if adverted to, might have prevented their utter ruin. But when *Pharaoh* said, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go^c?* and harden'd his heart against all those punishments inflicted by the divine providence; this was an extraordinary crime: and therefore God made the punishment as great; an extraordinary punishment was inflicted upon him. The prophet *Jeremiah* seems to speak the same thing concerning the *Israelites*: *O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, and have refused to return^d.* This is the most dreadful state of mind that can be imagin'd, when those methods which are most proper to awaken men to repentance, have not that effect upon them; but when, with a supercilious contempt, they cast off all kind

^c *Exod.* 5. 2.

| ^d *Jer.* 5. 3.

of thoughts of hearkening to the voice of God, how loudly and terribly soever he speaks.

(2.) There is a stupid sort of impenitency that some people are guilty of under the corrections of God. When they do not formally *despise his chastenings*, they contemn them. Tho they do not openly declare they will persist in their sins, and say, that *as for the word of the Lord we will not do it*; yet when they remain stupid under their afflictions, and will not reform from their iniquities, they may be said, very well, to *despise the chastenings of the Lord* to a great degree, tho not so great as the former. See the first chapter of Isaiah: where the prophet is describing the miserable condition wherein the nation of the Jews were, who had been very criminal. *Ver. 4. Ah sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord; they have provoked the holy One of Israel to anger; they have gone away backward, and had not regarded the methods which God had taken for reforming them. But, says he, ver. 5, 6. Why should you be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified*
with

with ointment. Then he goes on to threaten the desolation that should come upon them.

This is a very sad sign; when men remain stupid and impenitent, notwithstanding the afflictions the providence of God makes use of for their reformation. It was not so with the Corinthians, when God was pleased to chastise them for their unworthy receiving of the Lord's supper, so that many of them were weak and sickly upon that account. They were alarm'd to repentance, because some of them *were fallen asleep*^e; i. e. cut off by the providence of God, to alarm the rest. The apostle takes notice of their repentance: *with what fear, with what indignation, with what zeal*, they behaved themselves against their sins; *with what care*, and *with what clearing of themselves*^f; how industrious they were to reform. And we find the psalmist often speaks agreeably hereto, when he groans under his afflictions. He complains loudly of his sins; he cries out against his great iniquity; and invokes the divine mercy in a particular manner. You see how he expresses himself, how contrary to this stupid and impenitent frame of mind, in the 32d Psalm; tho he seems, for a while, to have been negligent of the hand of God. Ver. 3, 4. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old; thro' my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy*

^e 1 Cor. 11. 30.

| ^f 2 Cor. 7. 11.

upon me : my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Then, ver. 5, 6. I acknowledged my sin unto thee ; and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayst be found.

(3.) Persons may be guilty, even good men may be guilty of *despising the chastening of the Lord* in some degree, by an inadvertent negligence, when they take not that notice which they ought to do of the divine corrections with which they are exercised ; which is most commonly the case, when the afflictions are very gentle and easy. This kindness and indulgence of God, when he chastens us with great tenderness, when he lays upon us but *light afflictions*, and takes mild methods for our recovery from sin, will certainly work upon ingenuous minds ; and should ingage us more diligently to reform. But alas ! we often abuse the divine indulgence and favour, by neglecting to advert to it ; by looking upon our afflictions as if they were nothing but what is common to man ; as if there was no hand of God concerned in them.

It is true, indeed, that when extraordinary afflictions fall upon us, such as do not commonly befall men, there is no reason that we should repine at the providence of God which inflicts them ; because he has treated
others

others in the course of his government after the same manner. And if we compare our heaviest afflictions with those of the best of men recorded in the scripture, we have reason to acknowledge all is well, because God hath not laid more upon us than upon others, who have been much more holy and conformable to the divine will than we are. But even if the afflictions with which we are exercised are common, we should not account them as if they came not from the hand of God: for there are *no afflictions that arise out of the dust; neither doth any trouble spring out of the ground*^s. True piety will put us in mind of the hand of God in the least affliction: for the more a child loves his father, and the more ingenuity that child hath, the more sensible will he be of the least glance of his father's eye that signifies displeasure. Therefore we may be said to *despise the chastening of the Lord* when we take no notice, or little notice, of those lesser afflictions with which he exercises us. And as this is disingenuous, so it is dangerous. It is disingenuous: for, as all our afflictions come from the hand of our heavenly father, and it is in love that he chastises us; we should certainly take notice of the least turn of his eye, of the least stroke of his hand, when he is displeased with us. Such a neglect is dangerous also: for if we are not a-

^s Job 5. 6.

wakened with the lesser strokes of the divine hand, we are likely to pull down heavier judgments upon our heads. It behoves us, therefore on all occasions, whatsoever the affliction be, with which we are chastised, to take care that we do not despise the hand of the Lord that lays it on.

We are very prone, likewise, so to busy our thoughts upon second causes, as to forget that it is God who disposes of all persons and things, and of all events, as he sees good. We are ready to be angry with those who are instruments of our afflictions in this world; and to employ all our thoughts how we shall be delivered out of trouble, what means and measures we may use, humanly speaking, to get rid of the misery we are under; instead of adverting to the hand of providence, and considering that there is no *evil in a city*, no punishment, no affliction, but there is a hand of God in it. *Is there any evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it*^h? When men are reproached and reviled by their fellow creatures, their minds are too often filled with revenge; if not so, however with anger, against those who have offended them: whereas they ought piously to reflect upon the hand of God, and quietly submit themselves to him, as David did at the curses of Shimei. When one of his captains would have persuaded him to

^h Amos 3. 6.

be reveng'd upon him ; instead of hearkning to his advice, *let him curse*, says he ; *because the Lord hath said unto him curse David : who then shall say wherefore hast thou done so ?* “ There is a hand of God in it ; and “ this is permitted for my further humiliation : instead of irritating myself against “ him, I will humble myself still farther “ under the hand of God, and leave vengeance to him to whom it belongs.” We are often likewise so busy in projecting how we may get rid of our afflictions, in endeavouring to seek out some relief, that we forget what God designs thereby ; and so we are fastened in the net, and our troubles come more thick upon us, because we have neglected to repent and humble ourselves as God requires. It is true, we ought to use all those methods for our help under affliction, which human prudence directs ; and we may ask counsel of God how we may be delivered out of trouble : but we ought first to observe the hand of God in the affliction, and be humbled under it ; to look to the father of spirits with a *broken and contrite heart*, under a sense of our sins ; and then we shall not fail of some relief and support under our troubles, and perhaps a speedy deliverance out of them.

We are therefore to be thoughtful and considerate ; to watch the motions of our hea-

venly father, and so advert to the conduct of his providence, upon all accounts, as to observe the favour that he bestows upon us, that we may be thankful to him; and so to observe his hand in afflicting us, as to submit ourselves to his will, and humble ourselves after a becoming manner before him.

2. As to the other thing against which we are caution'd, the *being weary* or faint *when we are corrected of God*; we may observe,

(1.) That persons may be said to be *weary of divine correction*, when their minds are so disturbed that they make it appear by their murmuring and complaining against the divine providence. And if they do not express themselves openly after this manner, yet if such thoughts and sentiments are in their minds, they are guilty before God of being weary of his correction to a great degree. It is a reflection upon the goodness and mercy of God, and upon his wisdom and authority, when we are so weary of his chastenings as to murmur at him. As if *the judge of all the earth would not do right*^k; as if he did not treat us as his children, but as his enemies, when he hath so plainly and frequently declared that these are the corrections of a father. See what the prophet Isaiah speaks, chap. 45. *ver. 9, 10, 11.* con-

^k Gen. 18. 25.

cerning such a temper as this. *Wo unto him that striveth with his maker: let the potsherd strive with the potshards of the earth: shall the clay say unto him that fashioneth it, what makest thou; or thy work, he hath no hands? Wo unto him that saith unto his father, what begettest thou? or to the woman, what hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the Lord, the holy one of Israel, and his maker; ask of me things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me.* In these words God reproves the insolence of man, when he will, upon any account whatsoever, complain of the proceedings of his maker. The sovereign authority of God over us, were enough surely to silence us: and as he hath infinite power, so he hath infinite wisdom. It is not therefore for such ignorant and vile creatures as we are, to complain against the author of our being, and the governour of the world. It is as absurd as if the clay should cry out against the potter, what makest thou? or thy work, he hath no hands.

It is true, some may say concerning those words in the 11th verse, *Thus saith the Lord, the holy one of Israel, and his maker, ask of me things to come concerning my sons;* do not they encourage us to ask of God the design of all his works? and some people have made use of the following words, *concerning the works of my hands, command ye me,* to justify a peremptory and indecent way

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of expression before him in prayer, as if God required them to command him to do any thing. But there is more reason to believe that it is spoken ironically: *Ask of me of the things concerning my sons*; behave yourselves thus absurdly and foolishly, as to command me concerning *the work of my hands*: you who are vile creatures, less than nothing, and vanity, take upon you, if you think fit, to command me; and see what will be the consequence of this insolence of yours. Or in the same sense it may be spoken by way of interrogation; *do you ask of me, concerning my sons?* concerning the method of my proceeding? Do you command me? Do you pretend to take upon you the authority to do these things? And this is very agreeable to the context. How indecent and unjust a thing is it to murmur at the providence of God, and complain against his proceedings? This is very contrary to that meek temper which is recommended to us by the psalmist, in Psalm 39. ver. 2. *I was dumb with silence; I held my peace.* And, ver. 9, 10, 11. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away, like a moth.* Surely every man is vanity. How humbly and meekly does he speak? *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;*

that is, so as to complain indecently, and murmur at the divine providence. Tho he was ready to be consumed with the affliction, yet he would not speak indecently of the divine dispensations. So Eli, when he was told by Samuel of terrible judgments which God would bring upon his family; *it is the Lord*, says he, *let him do what seemeth good in his sight*¹. But,

(2.) As some may insolently murmur against the providence of God, and be ready to charge him foolishly, or to complain against the justice of his proceedings, or the wisdom of them; so some, by this means, work themselves into a despair of the mercy of God. They are so *weary of his chastenings*, that they are ready to say, *why should they wait upon the Lord any longer*^m? especially when the affliction is tedious, as to its duration, as well as to the degree of it. So the church was ready to say, or the prophet Jeremiah, in the 3d chapter of Lamentations, ver. 1. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. Here the prophet seems to complain for himself: He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light, &c. And in the 8th, and following verses: Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He hath inclosed my ways with heven stone: he hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He*

¹ 1 Sam. 3. 18.

^m 2 Kings 6. 33.

hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces : he hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins. I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness ; he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel-stones : he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace : I forgot prosperity. And I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord. The extremity of affliction seems to make him give up all his hope for the present. I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord ; remembring mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. But soon after he recovers from this indisposition of mind : This, says he, I recal to mind ; therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed ; because his compassions fail not. Even good men are sometimes ready to despair. My way, says the church, is hid from the Lord ; and my judgment is passed over from my God ⁿ.

But the apostle Paul, when he speaks of the greatness of his distresses, shews, at the same time, the confidence he had in God ; and that he was not weary of the chastenings of the Lord, which were inflicted on him :

ⁿ Isa. 40. 27.

2 Cor. 4. 8, 9, 10. *We are troubled, says he, on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.* As much as to say, "We have many great afflictions pressing us; but still we have that confidence in the divine goodness, that vigour of mind by the strength we receive from God, that we do not despair: *We do not cast away our confidence, which hath a great recompence of reward.*" And to the same purpose the apostle argues with the Hebrews, in the 12th chapter, when he paraphrases upon the words of our text; and shews them, that notwithstanding their afflictions were great, they being in persecution and tribulation, yet still God was *correcting and chastening them as children*: therefore they were not to *faint under his rebukes*.

This evil sometimes hath obtained upon men to such a degree, as to cause them to seek indirect ways of escaping the afflictions they are under. So Saul, when he found his circumstances in a very miserable condition, as God had predicted to him by the prophet, instead of humbling himself under the hand of God for his sins, strives to get rid of his troubles by applying himself to

° Heb. 10. 35.

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the witch of Endor ^P. Hereby he aggravated his transgression; and accordingly was intirely ruin'd. And even some good men have been ready to fly from God: in time of persecutions, some good men have been tempted to deny the truth. So dangerous is it *to be weary of God's chastenings*, that men thereby expose themselves to great guilt; and, consequently, to the danger of greater punishment. Instead of striving to fly from the hand of God in a way that he approves not of, we should first apply ourselves *to the father of spirits, that we may live* ^q; resign up ourselves to the conduct of his providence, and acknowledge he does it in *mercy* and in *very faithfulness* ^r, as the psalmist says: and then we may hope God will strengthen us to bear affliction, or find out a way for our escape from it.

But if good men do not, to that degree last mention'd, faint under the strokes of divine providence, yet they do too often distrust the providence of God, because they cannot see an end of their affliction; or because they are distressed so with the acuteness of their pain, that they can hardly look to God, can hardly pour forth their prayers to him, hardly believe he can deliver them out of the present trouble. They are ready to question God's love and faithfulness. When the psalmist, on the one hand, took notice

^P 1 Sam. 28.

^q Heb. 12. 9.

^r Psal. 119. 75.

of his own afflictions ; and, on the other hand, of the prosperity of the wicked ; he was, for the present, ready to think there was nothing at all in religion. Tho he did not totally despair, yet such sudden and unaccountable thoughts came into his mind, such thoughts that a good man can hardly pardon in himself, as if he had *cleansed his hands in vain* ; or as if God did not regard what befel good men in this world. See the 73d Psalm. The psalmist had said concerning the wicked, *ver. 5, &c. they are not in trouble, as other men ; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about, as a chain ; violence covereth them, as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness : they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression : they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens ; and their tongue walketh thro' the earth. Therefore his people return hither : and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know ? and is their knowledge in the most High ? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world : they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed mine hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued ; and chastened every morning. He was tempted to speak after this manner. But he soon recalls himself : ver. 15 — 18. If I say, I will speak thus ; behold, I should offend against the generation*

ration of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. q. d. "They are favoured by thy providence; but however they will be destroyed suddenly: whereas those who are chastened every morning, who have frequent corrections, are treated as thy children: therefore I will recal those thoughts; I will say no more *I have cleansed my heart in vain,*" &c. And he begins the psalm after this manner, *Truly God is good to Israel;* which shews that this psalm is a representation of those sudden and rash sentiments he had entertained of the divine dispensations, and how he was delivered from them.

We should have a care then of being weary of God's corrections, so as to distrust his faithfulness, or his goodness and mercy. We should rather interpret such dispensations as the apostle does¹, and as the wise man in our text; that all things are *for our profit*; that these are the corrections of a father, and not the wounds of an enemy; these troubles are brought upon us for our greatest advantage, to purify our souls from sin, and not that we may be destroyed by them. God does not take pleasure in our sorrows; does not strike us, because he delights to hear us

¹ Heb. 12. 5.

groan and cry ; but it is to make us better, and to render us more fit for intimate communion with himself, and for the enjoyment of a perfect state of bliss and glory hereafter.

Thus have I dispatched the first head ; shewn you what we are to understand by this caution of the wise man, *My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, &c.* All the afflictions in this world, of whatsoever kind, whether they are troubles from without, or from within, whether they are such as arise from our own thoughts, or from those calamities we are liable to while we are here ; whether it be loss of estate, or of reputation, or of health, or of friends, and relations ; whatsoever trial or affliction we are exposed to in this world, we are to acknowledge the hand of God in it. It is *his chastening* ; and we are to receive it, and submit to it, under the notion of a *chastening*. We are to be careful likewise, that we receive the correction from God as from a father. There is a peculiar relation betwixt him and the righteous. They are his children, in a special sense. He delights in them ; he hath a tender regard for them ; and, when he chastens them, it is *for their profit* : and that is an argument wherewith the wise man backs what he had said before. And so does the apostle : *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and correcteth every son in whom he delighteth ;* i. e. to whom he hath a tender regard. This is his method with them ; and it hath been

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been thus thro' the whole course of God's providence. This hath been declared thro'out the Old Testament, and the New. And as he hath all along taken this method, so the consequence of things hath plainly justified it, that he hath no design thereby, but for the advantage of his people; and that they may be conformable to him: he chastens them *for their profit*. But of this argument more at large hereafter.



SER-



SERMON IX.

Preach'd at

JOINERS-HALL, March 24, 1705-6.

PROV. iii. 11, 12.

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord: neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth; even as a father the son, in whom he delighteth.

The second SERMON on this text.



HO these words are the words of Solomon, it was observed to you, in a former discourse, that a *greater than Solomon is here*^s; and that this very passage is used by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, as spoken by God himself to his children^t. So that Solomon is not to be considered here as only speaking to his own family as a father, or to his subjects as the father of his people, or speaking as philosophers used to

^s Luke 11. 31.

^t Heb. 12. 5.

do to their disciples, with the tender compellation or expression, *my son*; but God himself is personated by him speaking to his children, to let them know how they ought to behave themselves under the afflictions of his providence.

I observ'd to you that the words consisted of two parts: the caution that is given against indecent behaviour under affliction, *My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor be weary of his correction*; and the argument by which this is enforced; *for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son, in whom he delighteth*. The former of these we have gone through. And, in explaining this caution, I have taken notice how the holy Spirit terms the afflictions which good men meet with in this world. They are all *corrections* and *chastenings of the Lord*. And tho' the term *chastening*, or *correction*, sometimes is used to signify the punishments God inflicts upon the wicked of the world, the lesser punishments, before *his wrath breaks forth like fire*, so that *none can quench it*; yet, in a special manner, God signifies hereby how he deals with his own peculiar people. And as the wicked are chastened by him as vassals are chastened by their Lord, or as subjects by the magistrate; so the people of God are chastened by him as a father. It is because he disdains not to call his people *his children*. And in a particular manner they are chastised by him with

with the wisdom, tenderness, and compassion of a father; designing all for their profit and advantage; and mixing all with abundance of mercy, in order to bring about that great end.

I have observ'd to you that there are various degrees of *despising the chastening of the Lord*, and of *being weary*, or *fainting under his correction*: that good men cannot, in the utmost degree, at any time *despise the chastening of the Lord*, or *be weary of his rebukes*; but they are prone to offend in this matter in some degree, and may sometimes be tempted to offend to a very great degree, unless they observe this divine caution. The wicked, when they are corrected by the providence of God, sometimes with a supercilious contempt *despise his correction*, and cry, *who is the Lord, that I should obey him*^u? as Pharaoh did; and very often with an obstinate impudence they refuse to be reclaim'd, and to return, tho God is pleas'd to repeat his strokes upon them. But good men themselves sometimes are guilty of so far *despising correction* from the hand of God, as to be supinely negligent, inadvertently negligent, when his corrections are not very severe. And sometimes they pore so much upon second causes, and are so diligently employed about using of temporal means to get rid of their afflictions, that they do not consult

^u Exod. 5. 2.

their consciences, and consider the hand that smites, so as to return at the reproofs of the Lord. Sometimes because no uncommon affliction happens unto them, no strange affliction, but what is common to men, they are ready carelessly to neglect consulting the divine will upon these occasions, and hearkning to the voice of providence: whereas *no affliction arises out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground*^v. But we ought seriously to reflect upon the divine hand in every chastisement we are exercis'd with, and whatever second causes may be the occasion thereof.

I have also shewn you, that tho it is not common for good men to murmur at the providence of God in those terms which the wicked do, who are ready to charge the Almighty with regardlesness, or injustice, or want of mercy, when they are severely afflicted; tho they do not so repine at the divine hand when God is pleased to smite them, as peremptorily to call him to an account concerning his matters, and to despair of his mercy; yet they are sometimes tempted to distrust his providence; their faith is weakened, and their hope is almost *like the giving up of the ghost*^w. They are ready to faint under his chastenings for the present, till they recover themselves, by calling to mind what they have often learned by experience,

^v Job 5. 6.| ^w Chap. 11. 20.

and by consulting in the sanctuary * the methods of divine providence in the government of the world, and the promises of God to his people, recover such a presence of mind, as enables them to reason justly concerning this affair. I have shewn you that we are, as much as possible, to avoid these extremes; not to slight the affliction when it is light and easy, nor to faint under the hand of God when his chastenings are heavy and severe. My business is now,

Secondly, To discourse of the argument in answer both to the one and to the other of these extremes; the argument of the wise man, and which afterwards the apostle in the 12th to the Hebrews uses, to shew that we are not to *slight the chastenings of the Lord, nor to faint when we are rebuked of him, or to be weary of his correction*; that we are not to be negligent of his strokes when they are more gentle, nor to be utterly disconsolate, or diffident of his chastisements when they are more terrible. The reason is in the 12th verse: *For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son, in whom he delighteth.* Correction is an argument of divine love: *Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth.* And this is illustrated to us by the comparison of a father, a wife and a tender-hearted father; *even as a father the son, in whom he delighteth.*

* Psal. 73. 17.

Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth. It is an argument of his kindness and indulgence to mankind in general, when he is pleased to correct them by his providence, before they incur the severity of his vengeance. And thus he often warns nations, and particular persons of their impending ruin, by previous corrections. And happy are they if they take notice of them; as it is said in Job 5. 17, &c. *Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine, he shall redeem thee from death; and in war, from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. Thus Eliphaz goes on in shewing the happiness of such as receive the divine corrections in a proper manner; what future judgments are prevented thereby, when they behave themselves decently under the correcting hand of God. But if the wicked will not turn, he whets his glittering sword, and his hand takes hold on judgment: he renders vengeance to them as to his enemies; and rewards them according to their iniquities.* Then, instead of chastening, destruction ensues.

7 Deut. 32. 41.

But our text, as I told you in the former discourse, hath a special regard to the methods of God in dealing with his own peculiar people: therefore I consider it with a special reference to them. And they are *blessed* indeed, whom God corrects after such a manner, as thereby to express to them his peculiar love; the persons whom he delights in, he therefore corrects, to signify his love to them. So that it seems, by the account the wise man gives us, that it is not at all inconsistent with the divine love to correct the best of men. It is so far from being inconsistent with his love, that it is an argument of his affection to them: and there is none whom he loves, but he takes care to correct after such a manner. The psalmist says of the wicked, *they are not in trouble, like other men*^z, &c. They seem to be given up by God to indulge themselves in their lusts, and abandon themselves to their sins. *Why should you be stricken any more?* says the prophet; *ye will revolt more and more*^a! Rebellious children, incorrigible children, of whom the parent despairs, they are given up and abandon'd, because there is no hope of reclaiming them. But those who belong to God's peculiar family, those who are his children, renewed by his grace, and adopted into his own family, his peculiar inheritance; these he will take care continually

^z Psal. 73. 5.| ^a Isa. 1. 5.

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to correct : he will not give them up to the power of temptation ; but, upon proper occasions, he will chasten them according to the terms of the covenant. *If thy children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail^b.*

God in justice gives up wicked men, when they have been corrected by his hand, and they do not return. But for his people, who are taken into covenant with him, and are become the children of his peculiar family, he hath oblig'd himself, and his love obliges him to correct them, that so they may be reformed, that so they may be recovered from their backslidings. This is very aptly illustrated by *a father's correcting his son, in whom he delighteth*. And you may please to observe the paraphrase that is made upon these words by the author to the Hebrews, in the 12th chapter, where he cites this text ; particularly that part of it I am now upon, *ver. 6. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth ; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Where he follows the translation of the Septuagint^c. The sense is much the same of the words in the text ; *as a*

^b Psal. 89. 30.

^c ὅν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος, πα- | δεικνύει μακροῦ δὲ πάντα ἕκαστον
ὅν παροτρύνεται. LXXII.

father the son in whom he delighteth. Here it is, *every son whom he receiveth*; i. e. whom he owns and acknowledges to be a member of his peculiar family; every son whom he receives to his peculiar favour, whom he acknowledges to be genuine. *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: or what son is he whom the father chasteneth not^d?* Is there any prudent father who does not correct his son? No, says the apostle. *God dealeth with you as with sons.* When he chasteneth you, it is an argument that he loves you as children. *But if ye are without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons^e.* You do not belong to the family, if you are not corrected. If you are the children of God, and delighted in, and loved by him as his children, you will certainly be chastened by him.

Furthermore, says the apostle, *we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be subject unto the Father of spirits, and live?* For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness^f. *We have had fathers of our flesh, to whom, under God, we owe our being, as the fathers of our flesh, or natural parents; these have corrected us, and we have*

^d Heb. 12. 7.^e Ver. 8.^f Ver. 9, 10.

given



given them reverence. But God is *the Father of our spirits*; he who made our souls, who *breathed into us the breath of life* ⁸, who made us rational beings. Besides that he is the author of our beings intirely; of our bodies, as well as of our souls, as he is our creator. And shall not we be subject to him? Shall not we pay him reverence, and submit ourselves to his chastenings? These *fathers of our flesh* considered the advantages of this animal life; *chastened us*, that we might not indulge ill humours and ill manners, which would render us unfit for human society. But *the father of our spirits* chastiseth us for the advantage of our souls, to make us fit for the heavenly society. The *fathers of our flesh* *chastened us for a few days* during the time of our minority, that so our ill inclinations and dispositions might be corrected, that we might be fitted for society in this world: but *for a few days*, till we could be supposed to govern ourselves by reason. But our heavenly Father corrects us *for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness*. He corrects us *for our profit*, till we are advanced to a state of maturity, and fitted for the heavenly kingdom. Our earthly fathers *chastened us for their own pleasure*; oftentimes out of humour more than out of prudence; oftentimes in a great deal of passion: however, after their own passions; in such a measure, and at such seasons as they

⁸ Gen. 2. 7.

thought fit. Perhaps they used too much indulgence, and so neglected the exercise of this duty; which, if rightly perform'd, might have prov'd to our great advantage: or else were too severe in their chastisements; which provokes children to wrath, and renders the correction ineffectual. But our heavenly Father chastises us *for our profit*: he always hath that in his view: and he uses tenderness and compassion in his chastisements. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*^h. As if the apostle should say, "It is true, this doctrine may not appear very grateful to you; for there is no affliction seems joyous to us for the present, but grievous: but, if we would reason justly, we must consider the future effects of it; afterwards it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

So that you see, as the wise man illustrates his argument by this comparison, when there is a just consideration of it, we find that God's correcting us for our sins, if we are his peculiar people, is done after such a manner, that it is an argument of much greater love as well as much greater wisdom, than appears in the correction that any earthly

^h Heb. 12. 11.

parent gives to any of his children. Therefore the argument is so much the stronger : *Whom he loveth, he chasteneth ; as a father the son, in whom he delighteth.* But to make this more evidently appear, let us consider it more particularly. And I shall shew you that correction is an argument of the divine love to good men, from the consideration of the usual method of God in this matter : and then, from the reason of the thing itself.

I. From the consideration of God's usual method. We may suppose that seeing God is infinitely wise, infinitely good, and infinitely merciful ; those on whom he hath placed the marks of his favour and kindness chiefly, must needs be fit examples to be proposed upon this occasion, from whom we may take measure. Now if we consider how God hath dealt with the most eminent servants of his that have ever been in the world, and it appears that he hath been used to correct and chasten them ; it cannot be inconsistent with his love, but must be a proof of it, wherever he is pleased to take this method. *Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name ; the Lord was merciful to forgive them their iniquities, but took vengeance upon their inventions* ⁱ. He chastened them for their sins, tho he pardoned them.

ⁱ Psal. 99. 6, 8.

Did he not exercise the most eminent patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with various troubles and afflictions? Did he not call them to a life of self-denial; to forsake their dearest relations and country, and to wander in a strange land, *not knowing whither they went* ^k? and did he not there exercise them with a multitude of afflictions? This was the case of Jacob more especially: so that he cried out, *all these things are against me* ^l. And yet it is evident God made all things concur for his good and profit. Was not Joseph exemplary for his piety, and chiefly so in his father's family? and yet this must be the person who should be exil'd and persecuted by his own brethren, and slandered as being guilty of that vice which he most abhorred, and confined in prison till the *irons entred into his soul* ^m; tho afterwards God brought him out of these afflictions, and advanced him to great temporal honour in Egypt.

Was not Moses tried with great afflictions, when he was ungratefully accused by his brethren; whom, when persecuted, he reveng'd at his own peril; whose differences he would have reconcil'd, but his kind offers were rejected? And did he not shew a just sense of his true interest, in *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season* ⁿ?

^k Heb. 11. 8.

^l Gen. 42. 36.

^m Psal. 105. 18.

ⁿ Heb. 11. 25.

Did not God exercise the church of Israel, when he called them out of Egypt, with great trials and afflictions while they were in the wilderness? Was not Job a man so pious, that God seems to have gloried in him? *Hast thou, says God to satan, considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth; a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil*^o? and yet who was exercised with greater affliction than he? Remember the patience of Job therefore, says the apostle James, *and the end of the Lord*^p. Was not David *a man after God's own heart*^q? yet who had more trouble and sorrow than he? who sighed and groaned oftner, and oftner *watered his couch with tears*^r, than he? Who was comparable to Jeremiah in his time, for love to God, and love to his church? but *I am the man*, says he, *that hath seen affliction*^s; the most remarkable for sorrow and affliction in his time.

And in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the object of his father's love in the most eminent manner, yet he was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*^s. It is true, his sufferings were ordained to make atonement for our sins: but there was another design in them also; viz. to set us an example of patience, and those

^o Job 1. 8.

^p James 5. 11.

^q 1 Sam. 13. 14.

^r Psal. 6. 6.

^s Lam. 3. 1.

^s Isa. 53. 3.

other graces which appeared in our Redeemer under all his afflictions; that we might *not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him.* For, what are our sorrows in comparison of his? Therefore the author to the Hebrews, in the beginning of that 12th chapter, advises us to *look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God^t.* If it were fair arguing, that when God chastens or corrects a man, he does not therefore love him; it would follow, that the Son of God being chastened and corrected by his father, was not beloved by him. But it must be acknowledged the Father loved him infinitely: yet was he *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.* Therefore the divine love is very consistent with our being exercised in this world with a state of affliction.

How do the apostles describe their own sufferings? *distressed on every side^u; in journeyings often; in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by their own countrymen^v, &c.* Besides the tears they shed upon the account of the weaknesses and sins of which the churches were guilty which they planted and watered; they were continually exposed to trouble. *Without were fightings, within*

^t Ver. 2.

^u 2 Cor. 7. 5.

^v Chap 11. 26.

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were fears: they were distressed on every side^w; yet they did not misinterpret the divine conduct towards them. *I think*, says the apostle Paul, *that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, to angels, and to men^x*: alluding to the Roman spectacles, that is, to those barbarous shews they made, in which gladiators fought till one destroyed another; or malefactors were torn by wild beasts in the sight of the multitude. “We
“are made such spectacles as these, exposed to
“all manner of cruelties: we serve to divert
“the wicked world by our sufferings; but, if
“our sufferings abound, our love abounds.” They did not accuse God for their afflictions; but argued, *these afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^y*. They considered that these chastisements were to improve them, and to make them ripe for heaven.

So that if we will take our measures from the conduct of God’s providence towards the best of men that ever have been in the world; we shall find he hath chastened them and corrected them very severely; and yet this was so far from being an argument of his want of love to them, that it was a proof of it; and so they themselves reckoned, when they spake most seriously about it. So says the psalmist: *Before I was afflicted, I went*

^w 2 Cor. 7. 7, 8.

^x 1 Cor. 4. 9.

| ^y 2 Cor. 4. 17.

astray;

astray ; but now I have learned to keep thy commandments ^z. And, *in very faithfulness thou hast afflicted me* ^a. But besides these examples which shew that this is the usual method God takes, let us come,

2. To consider the thing itself more narrowly. And it will appear that correction is an argument of the divine love, when we consider that this is a means in itself very well adapted to the end that God proposes, which is *our profit*, and *to make us partakers of his holiness* ^b ; to mortify our sins, and to make us more holy. These means are very well accommodated in themselves to this purpose. God hath not only declared that this is his design, to do us good ; (and if so, the principle from whence he acts must be love) he hath not only shewn it from the examples I have mentioned, and indeed the constant course of providence : but consider affliction in itself, and you will find it a proper means to promote our advantage. I will not suppose that any one doubts that the divine corrections are designed for our good, if by that good is meant our being rendred conformable to God in holiness ; for that is necessary in order to our being happy for ever. And therefore if it appear that this is a proper means conducive to that end ; it will appear farther, that it is out of love that God chastens us.

^z Psal. 119. 67.

^a Ver. 75.

^b Heb. 12. 10.

All the evil that befalls us, all the evil of suffering, is on account of the evil of sin. Therefore if the evil of suffering be made efficacious to subdue our sins, it must needs be for our advantage. Sin is the greatest evil in the world ; therefore it is of the highest importance for us to be delivered from it. Holiness is the greatest good of which we are capable ; and therefore it is of the greatest advantage for our souls to be adorned with it. Now afflictions tend both to mortify our sins, and to improve us in grace and holiness. They tend to mortify our sins, upon many accounts. What is more proper than affliction to make us remember how frail we are, that so we may *number our days, and apply our hearts to wisdom* ^c ? When all things are calm and serene about us, we are ready to forget we are mortal, that we are frail and imperfect creatures ; and to imagine that this is our state of happiness. But when God makes us feel the smart of affliction, this puts us in mind that this world *is not our rest, because it is polluted* ^d ; that here *we all walk in a vain shew* ^e ; that *all is vanity, and vexation of spirit* ^f ; and there is no solid delight to be taken in any thing here below. We are here but for a short season ; and there is no temporal enjoyment that can render us really and truly happy ; and therefore providence makes our

^c Psal. 90. 12.^d Mic. 2. 10.^e Psal. 39. 6.^f Eccles. 2. 17.

situation in this world uneasy to us: whatsoever our circumstances may be at present, some cross providence will imbitter all to us in a little time. And it is fit it should be so; for it tends to promote the original and great design of our beings, our happiness. This method of providence naturally puts us upon a proper consideration of things, and leads us to look after that which is better than we can enjoy in this imperfect state.

Particularly, the diseases of our bodies shew us constantly how frail we are; and as our own diseases, so the sicknesses and death of our friends teach us the weakness and mortality of our frame. And this is one of the precepts of wisdom, that we should *so number our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom*^g. And experience abundantly testifies, that mens considering their own frailty and mortality, has prov'd a very advantageous means to make them serious; that, as Solomon observes, *the living lay to heart the death of others*^h. When we lose our friends and acquaintance, does not this make us consider that *all men walk here in a vain shew*ⁱ; and that for us to be happy for ever, is to have an intimate acquaintance with God, and communion with him? When we lose our estates, or any part of them, (for *riches make to themselves wings, and fly away from us*^k) as this

^g Psal. 90. 12.

^h Eccles. 7. 2.

ⁱ Psal. 39. 6.

^k Prov. 23. 5.

puts us in mind of the vanity of these earthly treasures ; so it is natural to consider here-upon that we should *lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven*¹, and that we should the more carefully improve the remaining talent which God hath intrusted in our hands, before we lose it. When we are under any trouble or affliction in this world, it should put us upon considering that our true happiness is not to be obtained here, but that we are to seek for a sublime happiness in the heavenly state ; *durable riches, and righteousness*^m ; an establishment that can never be shaken ; a kingdom that can never be mov'd ; a state of life that will be far from the fear of death, or the least pain or sorrow. What can be more proper to put us in mind of these things ? prosperity makes us forget them ; but affliction revives those ideas upon our souls, and makes us sensible of these things, the consideration of which, is of the greatest importance to us.

And as our affliction thus puts us in mind of our own frailty, and the vanity of this world, and the things of it ; so it is very natural, if we are serious and considerate, for these afflictions to make us look back to the cause from whence they spring. When a man finds himself in misery, is it not proper for him, as a rational creature, to say ; " From whence does this affliction come ?

¹ Mat. 6. 20.| ^m Prov. 8. 18.

“ Not from second causes only, but from the
 “ providence of God: and why should this
 “ God, who is so good, so wise and merci-
 “ ful, afflict me after this manner? He de-
 “ lights not in my sorrow and trouble. He
 “ *does not willingly afflict or grieve the chil-*
 “ *dren of men*”. *As I live, saith the Lord, I*
 “ *have no pleasure in the death of a sinner* °.
 “ He does not delight in the sorrows of his
 “ people in themselves; but he afflicts them
 “ to prevent their falling into a greater mis-
 “ chief: as he is a God of infinite wisdom,
 “ he certainly sees there is an occasion, a
 “ necessity for it. He is a just God; he is a
 “ merciful God; and peculiarly merciful to
 “ his children: and if I am entitled to that
 “ character, most surely he would never
 “ afflict me with this or that trouble, if it
 “ were not to deliver me from a greater
 “ mischief.”

As our afflictions, thus duly considered,
 have a proper tendency to discover the kind-
 ness of God towards us in his conduct; so
 they naturally put us in mind of our sins.
 If so; then it is certain it is *for our profit*,
 that we are afflicted; and an argument of
 the divine love, to bring us to repen-
 tance. This is the way to deliver us from
 the power of sin. This is the way to render
 us conformable to the divine image; which
 comprehends in it a renunciation of sin, and

° Lam. 3. 33.

| ° Ezek. 33. 11.

a betaking ourselves to the practice of holiness. Therefore if affliction reduces us to repentance, it is an argument of the divine love to us ; because whom God loves, he brings to repentance : *Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten*, saith the Lord : *be zealous therefore, and repent* ^p.

Moreover, the love of God appears in the chastening of his people ; not only as this is a proper means to make them holy, but in regard of the circumstances which attend the afflictions he is pleased to exercise them with : such circumstances attend their afflictions, as shew that they proceed from the hand of a father ; and therefore ought to dispose them to act the part of children by their reverence and submission, and acknowledgment of the divine love. For sometimes, nay generally, he gives us warning before he strikes ; either by the motions of his free spirit upon our consciences, when we hear or read his word, or when we seriously recollect ourselves ; or by some dispensation of his providence, by which he corrects others within our knowledge. And if he calls, and we will not hear, is it any wonder then that he does correct us ; and if a gentler chastisement will not do, that he corrects us more severely ? It is certainly a gracious discovery of the love of God in that he declares an unwillingness to punish, and that he is loth to inflict the stroke ; but that he does it because it is

necessary for our advantage. He says to his people at all times, as to Israel of old, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, O Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together*⁹. He seems loth to inflict upon us the severe strokes of his providence; and oftentimes waits long that we may attend to the gentler methods of chastisement, before he expresses his anger in a more severe manner. We have reason, therefore, to remark the divine love, in proceeding so gradually with us; and not bringing upon us surprising afflictions, without giving us notice or warning to prepare. Thus the Lord speaks by his prophet: *And because I will do this thing, therefore prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*¹⁰.

And as the Lord gives warnings before; so when he strikes his people, there is tenderness and compassion mixed with the stroke. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities*¹¹. He does not inflict upon us so much as our iniquities have deserved; for then he would destroy us. Therefore we may be thankful to his providence that he chastens us here, *that we may not be condemned with the world*¹². And from hence we may observe the divine love in the method of his

⁹ Hof. 11. 8.

¹⁰ Amos 4. 12.

¹¹ Psal. 103. 10.

¹² 1 Cor. 11. 32.

afflicting

afflicting providences. If we would consider our sins, and compare them with our afflictions; this would silence all our repinings, and make us submit ourselves intirely to the divine chastisement: this would make us say with the church in the Lamentations, *Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* Lam. 3. 39. Whether the prophet speaks of himself, or personates the church, it is all one to our purpose. See ver. 33—36. *For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.* As much as to say; “if we
 “meet with very unjust treatment from our
 “enemies, it is not because the Lord de-
 “lights in afflicting us; for he loves and
 “treats us as a father.” He says, in the 38th verse, *Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good.* Then, ver. 39. *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* Ver. 40. *Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.* Ver. 41. *Let us lift up our heart, with our hands, unto God in the heavens.* Ver. 42. *We have transgressed, and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.* Ver. 43. *Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain; thou hast not pitied.* That is, thou hast acted so remarkably in

the course of thy providence, as if thou hadst no compassion: *Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer shall not pass thro'.* But yet observe, he still trusts in God: ver. 49, 50. *Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission; till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven.* He hoped still the Lord would look down upon him. And you find the emotions of his faith before, in ver. 31, 32. *For the Lord will not cast off for ever. But tho he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. His anger endureth but for a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*^t

God does not afflict us after so severe and terrible a manner as he might have done, nor does he lengthen out the affliction to the degree that he might have done; but he debates with it: and tho the affliction sometimes may be very great; yet he shines into the soul with his loving kindness, and mixes mercy with affliction. *In the midst of judgment he remembers mercy*^u: and this he doth frequently, by giving us spiritual consolations under the greatest temporal afflictions. So that tho there is his hand to chasten us, the hand of his justice; there is also the hand of his mercy to support us, and to revive our souls. *If our afflictions abound, our*

^t Psal. 30. 5.| ^u Hab. 3. 2.

consolations oftentimes *much more abound* ^v. Therefore we have reason to argue this as the effect of his love. For, if he deprives us of lesser things, and gives us greater, what reason is there of complaint? If he deprives us of temporal things, and refreshes our souls with the joys of a divine and spiritual nature; if he is pleased to converse with us by the influences of his free spirit, in the loss of relations, or any worldly comfort; we have cause to acknowledge there is faithfulness and mercy mix'd with the affliction.

I cannot enumerate to you the various ways whereby God alleviates our troubles, whereby he shews his love even in the midst of affliction. But then, he makes his love appear afterwards with the greatest evidence; after his people have been corrected and afflicted, when *the peaceable fruits of righteousness* are brought forth ^w. Whereas they found, by experience, that *before they were afflicted they went astray* ^x, but now they have learned his testimonies; when they find the good fruits produced in their souls thereby, this convinces them that it is *in very faithfulness that God chastens and afflicts them* ^y. And we are not so proper judges of the principles from whence God acts when we are under pressing trials, as when we come to a deliberate thought;

^v 2 Cor. 1. 5.

^w Heb. 12. 11.

^x Psal. 119. 67.

^y Ver. 75.

when our minds are calm, and when the providence of God hath let us see the consequence of his afflicting hand, and so explained to us what was his design, and the principle from which he acted.

Our views are so short, we are so ignorant, and so liable to be transported by our passions, that we judge unreasonably and unjustly concerning the conduct of God's providence when we are under affliction: but when we are come to ourselves, when the affliction is so far over that we are able to judge calmly of the matter, when we consider what fruit is brought forth to our souls, when we see our sins are mortified, and we are brought to submit to the divine will, and can say, *not my will but thy will be done*²; when we consider that our pride, negligence, and oscitancy are subdued, that our graces are quickened, and we are engaged in a more vigorous discharge of the various duties of religion; when we find *our affections* are taken off from the things of this world, and *settled upon things above*; then we cannot but acknowledge that God *hath in love and mercy afflicted us*; and he *hath dealt with us as with children, and not as with slaves*; that he *hath chastened us for our profit*³; not that he took pleasure in our miseries and sorrows, but because he thought it necessary for us, for our good and advantage, that we should be afflicted.

² Luke 22. 42.

| ³ Heb. 12. 10.

If we compare our case, even in affliction, with that of the prosperous wicked ; what a deplorable condition are they in, who are left secure in their vices till they drop into everlasting ruin ? Have we not an abundant cause to admire the divine mercy and compassion, that our heavenly Father will not cast us off for our transgressions, but will take care of us to correct us ; and will rather afflict us, than suffer sin upon us, which is so hurtful to us ? Is not this an argument of his paternal love, that as he has adopted us into his family, he is so intimately concerned for our welfare, that he will not suffer us to go on in sin, which has such a tendency to alienate us from himself and true happiness ; but will awaken us by his providence, that we may have due contrition of mind, and may be restored to the manifestations of his divine favour, and the light of his countenance ?

So that you see, whether we consider the method which God hath used with the best of men hitherto ; or whether we consider the nature of these chastenings, how much better they are for us than a state of prosperity, and how well they are adapted to our circumstances, to make us more holy and more happy here, and to prepare us for heaven, how very advantagious to our souls in this world, in order to procure us peace of conscience, and to make us fit for a better state ; especially if we con-

sider with all, the mixture of mercy which accompanies our afflictions, and compare with all these the good consequences which God hath sometimes produced upon our souls, and which we shall see in the end will be the product of the afflictions that we labour under, if we are attentive to the voice of God under them: whether we consider the one or the other, or all these things together; we shall find that the wisdom and goodness of God evidently appear in his afflicting providences towards us. God *chastens every son whom he receiveth*, as the apostle says; *or as a father the son, in whom he delighteth*.

Let me make a little improvement of what hath been said, and so conclude.

1. This shews us how the generality of men mistake in the opinion they entertain concerning happiness and misery; and, consequently, how they are mistaken in the judgments they form concerning the providence of God; what a multitude of errors, and those very destructive too; how many false judgments are made concerning God's dealings with his people. The generality of the world *call the proud happy*; and those *that work wickedness are set up*^b. These are the objects of peoples envy; and they count these extraordinary happy men; whereas,

^b Mal. 3. 15.

if we take our measures according to the account given us in the holy scripture, this does not always follow, but oftentimes the contrary. So, on the other hand, what false judgments do people make concerning the afflictions which attend the righteous? How many do they look upon as miserable, who are really happy? for, *blessed is the man whom God chasteneth^c*; whom he correcteth; who are treated as the children of God, tho they are *chastened every morning^d*. And tho they are accounted the most miserable wretches in the world, if they are the children of God, they are afflicted for their profit; and it is an argument of God's love to them. How wrongly do men judge concerning the divine conduct? *Love and hatred are not known by the things that are done under the sun^e*. We cannot say that God loves a man and delights in him, because *he is not in trouble like other men^f*; and that God hates a man, because he is under severe affliction and chastisement. But it is very often the contrary: those who are extremely afflicted, are under the tender regard of divine providence; and God sees it proper for them, for the mortifying their sins, and advancing them in grace, to conform them to his own likeness in holiness, and to make them everlastingly happy.

^c Psal. 94. 12.^d Psal. 73. 14.^e Eccles. 9. 1.^f Psal. 73. 5.

Hereafter all these difficulties of providence will be explained: then it shall appear who were the miserable, and who the happy men. These obscurities of providence will pass away; and the whole world will know who were the persons that God delighted to honour with his paternal affection, tho they were grievously afflicted in this world, desolate, forsaken; *of whom the world was not worthy.* Tho they have met with the worst treatment from the hands of men, and tho *the hand of God hath touched them*; yet in the end it will be manifest, that their wise and gracious father has improved their souls in humility, resignation, faith, and hope thereby: and all these improvements of grace shall be then abundantly rewarded. Thus their afflictions shall brighten and enrich their crown of glory: they are afflicted, that they may be like God in holiness, that so they may be made like him in happiness also.

Let us have a care therefore of making false judgments concerning others, or ourselves. How are people apt to conclude, because such a man is in greater affliction than others, therefore he must be a greater sinner than other men: as the Jews, concerning the man that was born blind; *Master, said they, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* It seems they held

the Pythagorean notion of transmigration of souls: therefore they asked whether this man had sinned; this man in another body, that he was born blind? Our Saviour also speaks of *those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, and those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, that they were not greater sinners than others*^h. Therefore we must take care that we do not pass a wrong judgment upon the case of those who are most afflicted in this world. The barbarous people, on whose coast the apostle Paul was cast, when they saw the viper on his hand, said, *no doubt this man is a murderer; whom, tho he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live*ⁱ. As if, because an affliction befalls a man in the course of God's providence, it must needs be that he was a greater criminal than other people. And you see the same people presently ran into another extreme. When he shook the viper off, and received no harm; they immediately *changed their minds, and said that he was a God*^k.

2. As we must have a care of rash judgment concerning others; so we must have a care of misinterpreting the providence of God towards ourselves. We may not judge, because we have been, and are exercised with many and great afflictions, that therefore God hath no respect for us; for thus we may *condemn the generation of the just*^l,

^h Luke 13. 2.ⁱ Acts 28. 4.^k Ver. 6.^l Prov. 17. 15.

the best of men that ever have been in the world: we are not to conclude from the greatness of our afflictions that our sins are greater than the sins of others, who are not so afflicted as we are; for then we may deny what is really true; deny what God hath done for our souls, and deny what he hath done for many excellent persons whose examples are recorded in the holy scriptures. It is the safest way indeed to make this judgment, that there would no affliction befall us if it were not for our sins: so as the Jews us'd to say when they were afflicted, there were some grains of the golden calf in their affliction. But let us not imagine that God does not love us, because he chastiseth us for our transgressions; since his end and design is, *that he may take away our sins*, which are the most hurtful and prejudicial to us. *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin^m.* Seeing God afflicts us less than we deserved; and seeing it goes against him to afflict us, and he would not do it if we did not make it necessary; we ought to conclude that his chastisements are the effects of his love. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, O Israel? how shall I make thee, as Aamab? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled togetherⁿ.*

^m Isa. 27. 9.| ⁿ Hos. 11. 8.

What is more common than for good people to conclude that they are not God's children, because they are afflicted? But you should rather argue the contrary way; "God would not afflict me, but I should be left to go on in my sins, if I were not his child, if I belonged not to his family. "I am therefore *now chastened, that I might not be condemned with the world*." Endeavour to make a due improvement of afflictions, and by no means censure the divine hand that lays them on. As on the one hand, it is a stupid thing to be inconsiderate, and neglect a due observation of the hand of God in our afflictions; so, on the other, it is a dangerous thing to *faint under them*, and to *be weary when we are corrected by him*: we should rather learn hereby to depend upon his providence, and subject ourselves intirely to his will.

3. If the case be so with respect to the dispensations of God's providence, as you have heard; and tho we be the favourites of heaven, we must not expect to pass thro' this world without affliction, and indeed it would be a sad sign upon us if we did; then let this teach us to aspire after a better state, to look after solid happiness and satisfaction in a better world. We are here as so many pilgrims and strangers, in a state of mourning because of our sins. But let us not be dis-

• 1 Cor. 11. 32.

couraged :

couraged : there will be a state of pleasure ; there will be a state of rest ; there will be a state of security and happiness hereafter. It is worth our while to walk circumspectly while we are here ; to walk here with holy fear and trembling, to watch against our sins, to consult the providence of God continually, to yield ourselves to the chastisements he inflicts, having our eyes upon the peace and happiness that is before us. We are children ; that is our happiness. But we are minors ; we cannot conduct ourselves : therefore God will not leave us to ourselves : he takes us under his immediate care and conduct ; and we shall ere long be brought to a perfect state of happiness. Therefore let us not, on the one hand, *despise the chastisements of God*, nor, on the other hand, *faint when we are rebuked of him*,





SERMON X.

Christ consider'd under the
character of the Lamb of
God.

Preach'd at

PINNERSHALL, Jan. 20. 1704-5.
on a sacramental occasion.

JOHN i. 29.

*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto
him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of
God, which taketh away the sin of the
world.*

The first SERMON on this text.

VER since sin entred into the
world, God hath been pleased to
make known, in some degree, his
design of sending the Saviour, the
Lord Jesus Christ ; who *appeared
in the fulness of time, to put away sin by the
sacrifice of himself*^p. He was made known

^p Heb. 9. 6.

in

in the Old Testament by the prophets, the messengers of God, who assured the church that this glorious person would come in the due and proper time to this great end and purpose : he was the object of the hope of the patriarchs and prophets, and the whole church under the Old Testament : and he is the object of our faith under the new. They looked forward upon him as a Saviour that was to come ; they *waited*, as 'tis said of Simeon, *for the consolation of Israel*^a ; that is, the coming of the Messiah : and we look back upon the same Saviour as already come. We build upon the same foundation : as they believed in a Christ to come ; so we believe in him as already come, having *once for all made himself a sacrifice for our sins* upon the cross^r. As this was a matter of the highest importance, and therefore revealed by the prophets in several ages, with divers degrees of clearness, and more and more evidently, by how much the nearer his coming approached ; so John the baptist, who was the great forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, spoke of him after a more express and particular manner than any others ; and, being contemporary with him, knew how to point at the person who was to perform the great work of delivering sinners, and to endure the sufferings of the cross to that end. The dignity of our Saviour's person was

^a Luke 2. 25.| ^r Heb. 7. 27.

such, that it was fit he should be ushered in by a forerunner. And accordingly John the baptist was born a little before him, and entred into his ministry before Christ; because his office was to declare the immediate coming of the Son of God. On this account our Saviour declares, that *among those that were born of women, there was not a greater prophet than John the baptist*^t. Tho he did no miracle, yet his office was so much the greater, because he was the immediate forerunner of the Redeemer.

The Words of our text declare the character that John gave of our blessed Saviour, and of the great work he was to do. The former part of the verse I need not insist on, because it points only at the time. *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the World.* The Pharisees and Scribes had been interrogating John concerning his ministry; concerning his message, and the character he bore: they wanted to know what he pretended to be, for they found something extraordinary in his ministration; Ver. 19. *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, who art thou?* Ver. 20. *And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.* They were in expectation of the coming of the Messias about that time: and John appear-

^t Luke 7. 28.

ing as a person of extraordinary piety and self-denial, there being such eminent characters on his ministry, and the manner of his life and conversation, that convinced them he was a prophet; they imagin'd that this was the Messias. But John confessed that it was not so: *He denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ. They asked him, what then; art thou Elias? and he said, I am not; art thou that prophet? and he answered, no^t.* It was prophesied by Malachi, that *before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, Elijah the prophet should come, and should turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just^s:* which great work is, Mat. 17. 11. described by the phrase of *restoring all things.* The Jews therefore supposed either that this was Elias raised from the dead; or else that the soul or spirit of Elias, by transmigration, had passed into another body. It appears that many of them entertain'd that opinion of the transmigration of souls: therefore the disciples of our Lord, from this notion they had received among the Jews, asked him concerning the man who was blind from his birth, *whether for his sins, or the sins of his parents, he was born blind^t?* Now, how could it be for his sins, unless he had committed sins before he was born? They imagined therefore that he might have com-

^t John 1. 21.

^s Mal. 4. 5, 6.

^t John 9. 1, 2.

mitted sins before he was born, and for which his soul was cast into another body. This was the opinion of the Pythagorean Philosophers, and was become common among the Jews. On this account therefore they asked John, *whether he was Elias?* But you hear what John answered them; *I am not: art thou that prophet then?* and he answered them, *no.* They might possibly apprehend, that when John said he was not Elias, he meant that his body was not the same; his body was not raised from the dead. *But art thou that prophet,* hast thou his soul? no, he answered, that he was not that prophet. *Then said they unto him who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? what sayest thou of thyself?* And he said, *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah^v.* That is, I am he of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks, when he prophesies of the forerunner of Christ. *And they which were sent were of the Pharisees; and they asked him, and said unto him, why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet^v?* This text, by the way, overturns the notion of those who imagine that baptism, as it is an ordinance to be used in the church of Christ, was a custom among the Jews before the revelation of the gospel. If it had been a former custom a-

^v John 1. 22, 23.| ^u Ver. 24, 25.

mong the Jews to baptize those who were profelyted to their religion; then they would not at all have wondred that John should undertake to baptize. But they, by the novelty of that practice, and something more than common in his ministry, saw that he pretended to be more than an ordinary prophet; and therefore they asked him, why he baptized. *John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there stands one among you whom you know not; he it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me; whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose* ^w. “I baptize with water, but there is one among you, there is one born or grown up, there is one going to preach and to publish his own doctrine among you, who is greater than I. I am not worthy to loose his shoes, to do the meanest service for him; and am only sent before to proclaim his coming.” Thus humbly does he speak of himself. *These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* After John had declared that he was not the Messias, but that the Messias was another person, and one who was amongst them; the next day he tells them who this person was: seeing Christ coming to him, he directs them

^w Ver. 26, 27.

to him. *Behold*, says he, *this is the lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world.* Where you have two things in general.

I. The character which John the baptist gives our Saviour: he calls him *the lamb of God.*

II. The declaration he makes of the end and design of Christ's coming into the world under that character; *to take away the sin of the world.*

I. The character John the baptist gives our Saviour; *Behold the lamb of God.* This is a name frequently applied to Christ by the evangelist John. As he represents the baptist thus speaking of our Lord in the text; so also after the same manner, *ver. 35, 36.* of this chapter: *Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples: and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, behold the lamb of God.* And as in his gospel, so also in the book of the Revelation he very often speaks of Christ by the same description; even after our Saviour was ascended and exalted to the glory of heaven: *Rev. 5. 6. And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. Seven horns, to signify the perfection of power; and seven eyes to signify the perfection of wis-*

dom. So again, ver. 13. *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, honour, glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb for ever and ever.* That is, to the Father and to the Son. And in the 6th chapter, ver. 1. *I saw when the lamb opened one of the seals.* And again in the 15th and 16th verses of the same chapter: *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?* That is, the wrath of Christ, when he shall come to judge the world. Again, in the 7th chapter, and 9th verse: *After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb. And in the 14th verse: And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Which puts it beyond exception, that this character is given to Christ in this book. So in the 16th and 17th verses: They shall*
hunger

hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. In several other places of the same Book, you find still the same character given to our blessed Lord: chap. 12. 11. And they overcame him, that is, the dragon, by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony. And they loved not their lives unto the death. Chap. 13. 8. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, that is, the beast, whose names are not written in the book of life, of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world: that is, slain in the purpose of God. Chap. 14. ver. 4. These are they, speaking of the redeemed, which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins: these are they which follow the lamb whithersoever he goeth: these were redeemed from amongst men, being the first fruits unto God, and to the lamb. And, ver. 10. speaking of the torment of the wicked: The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the lamb. Chap. 15. 3. And they shall sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the lamb. That is, they shall celebrate the glory of Christ, as well as that of God

the Father. You find the same character farther given our blessed Lord in the 21st chapter: the church is there called *the bride, the lamb's wife*, ver. 9. and, ver. 22. *And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty, and the lamb, are the temple of it.* And in the 22d chapter, ver. 1. *And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the lamb.* Ver. 3. *And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God, and of the lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.*

I cite so many of these passages together, that I may observe, from hence, how this apostle delights to give this title to our Lord Jesus Christ. There is something peculiar in the writings of each of the apostles. Of the apostle John it is remarked, that he speaks more of love, and of the charge Christ gave his disciples to love one another; and gives a larger account of the exhortations our Lord gave them, and the supplications he, on that occasion, made to heaven for them, all which were full of tenderness and compassion, than any other of the evangelists. For tho God makes use of the graces of good men, and of their gifts as he pleases; yet there is a considerable variety: some are more eminent for one thing, and some for another. This apostle's heart seems to have been impressed with a peculiar sense of the love of Jesus Christ, in giving himself up to die

die for sinners. And as he was his special favourite who lean'd upon his bosom as he sat at meat; so he declares himself to be deeply affected with the great love of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners. Moreover, he was a witness of Christ's sufferings to the last; for when the other disciples forsook him and fled, he stood by the cross and saw him bleed and die there: therefore there must be a strong impression of love made upon his mind. He frequently calls Christ the *lamb*, as being mindful of the sacrifice of himself, which he saw him offer up with so much meekness and patience on the cross. But let us consider the reason why this character is given to our Lord Jesus more particularly; *behold the lamb of God*: why he is called a *lamb*, and why the *lamb of God*.

1. Why he is called a lamb. He is called a *lamb* on the account of his sufferings; and on the account of the manner of his sufferings.

(1.) On the account of his sufferings. As soon as sacrifices were instituted, those you see of the flock were offered. *Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock* *. The first account we have of sacrifices is of such an offering as this: and this may be the reason why Christ is said to be *slain from the foundation of the world* †; not only was he design'd to be a

* Gen. 4. 4.

† Rev. 13. 8.

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^x Gen. 4. 4.

| ^y Rev. 13. 8.

sacrifice, but, at the first celebration of sacrifices that we read of, Christ was prefigured by the offering of the lamb; as in Abel's sacrifice, which was so acceptable to God.

When our Lord's sufferings were typified by Isaac, the danger whereunto we were brought by sin was signified by Isaac's being bound, and laid upon the altar, and upon the wood; and the sacrificing knife almost at his throat: and then a ram was found caught in a thicket, which was sacrificed instead of him. This, I say, was to represent the danger we were in because of our sins, The sword of justice hanging over our heads ready to execute us; and, behold, God provides himself a lamb, whose sacrifice should be sufficient to make atonement for our sins. So Abraham said to Isaac, *God will provide himself a lamb. Behold the fire and the wood, says Isaac; here is provision made, every thing ready; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?* God, says Abraham, *will provide himself a lamb*^z. Thus our Lord Jesus was eminently represented by that sacrifice, which was substituted in the room of Isaac, when he was rescu'd from death.

Again: the paschal lamb, at the coming of the children of Israel out of Egypt, was one of the most eminent types under the Old Testament. John might well call him *the lamb of God* on that account. Had I

^z Gen. 22. 7, 8.

time, I might more particularly shew you how our Lord was typified by this institution: however, I think it is very evident that the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, upon the occasion of the lamb's being offered, and being eaten after such a manner as is described by Moses ^a, signifies our deliverance from a state of servitude; from a state of sin and misery. The passing over the families where the paschal lamb was slain, signifies God's withholding his judgments from those who are interested in the blood of Jesus. And the sprinkling the blood of the lamb upon the door-posts, signifies that nothing could guard and secure us from the sword of vengeance but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the effusion of his blood. The roasting of the lamb, was to represent the torments which Christ endured upon the cross. The roasting of it whole, the perfection of our Saviour's sacrifice. The eating thereof with bitter herbs, was to signify the bitterness of those sufferings which Christ felt; and that contrition and humiliation of mind, which becomes us when we partake of the blessings our Saviour hath purchased: for it is impossible to be interested therein without repentance and faith. These, and other particular circumstances relating to the paschal lamb, shew how well our Lord was thereby prefigured. So like-

^a Exod. 12.

likewise in those sacrifices which were daily offered among the Jews, all circumstances concur to signify how fit this title was to be given to our blessed Lord ; the *lamb of God*. It is as much as to say, " Behold him who " is the antitype of all the sacrifices under " the law."

(2.) By our Saviour's being called the *lamb of God*, is signified the manner of his suffering. These creatures are not so tumultuous and noisy as other animals are, when they are seized and brought to the slaughter ; but bear their death after such a manner as renders them fit to represent patience and meekness. Therefore our Lord is compared to this creature on this account ; as you see in the 53d of Isaiah : which is applied to our blessed Redeemer in the New Testament. In the 6th verse of that chapter we are compared to sheep for our going astray. *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* And he is compared to a sheep for his patience and meekness, in the verse following: *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth ; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.* The patience and meekness of our Saviour under his great sufferings, gave the prophet occasion to represent him by this comparison. And John the baptist takes notice of Christ under this

this character of a *lamb*, undoubtedly on the account of the sufferings he was to undergo, and on the account of the manner of his behaviour under them, which would be like a lamb; *a lamb brought to the slaughter; or as a sheep dumb before his shearers, so he would not open his mouth.* But,

2. Why is he called *the lamb of God*? This is by way of distinction, and dignity; to shew that he was a very remarkable person indeed, the person whom God had design'd and constituted to be the antitype of those offerings and sacrifices under the law, the messenger of God, a sacrifice of God's providing. *I have found a ransom^b*, says the Almighty: *God will provide himself a lamb^c*, says Abraham. This is *the lamb of God*, a lamb of God's providing; that was typified by the others which were instituted and provided under the Old Testament. *The sacrifices of God are a broken heart*, says the psalmist: *a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise^d*. The other sacrifices, the sacrifices of beasts, were indeed instituted by God: but there was no excellency in these sacrifices, in comparison to the sacrifice of a broken heart; for God despised all the sacrifices of beasts, if there was not contrition of mind in the persons who offered them. And then in regard of making atonement for sin, they were but typical of

^b Job 33. 24.

^c Gen. 22. 8.

^d Psal. 51. 17.

our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the sacrifice of God. Christ was a sacrifice sent of God, of his choosing and ordaining, to make satisfaction for sin; *to take away the sin of the world. Sacrifice and offerings thou wouldst not*, says Christ in the 40th Psalm. *Then said I, lo I come to do thy will, O God. In the volume of thy book it is written of me^e.* God rejected those sacrifices as to any real atonement they could make: *for it is impossible the blood of bulls, and goats, should take away sin^f.* But this is the sacrifice of God, *the lamb of God*; a sacrifice which he accepts: for he declared himself well-pleased with his Son's undertaking, when he enter'd upon his work. *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased^g.* And in that eminent prophecy of what he was to perform, which we have recorded in the 53d of Isaiah, God declares himself well-pleased with this sacrifice. When his sufferings are spoken of by the prophet, and that *his soul should be made an offering for sin*; 'tis added, *He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many^h.* This is a sacrifice that will make an effectual atonement.

He might be called *the lamb of God* likewise in regard of his near alliance to the

^e Psal. 40. 6, 7;

^f Heb. 10. 4.

^g Mat. 3. 17.

^h Ver. 10, 11.

Father:

Father : not only a lamb of his providing, ordain'd by him as a sacrifice, and accepted by him ; but in a peculiar sense, his being his own son, of the same nature with the Father in regard to his divinity, and miraculously produced in regard of his humanity.

Having thus explain'd the terms, and shewn how they refer to the sufferings of Christ, and the manner of his undergoing those sufferings ; I come now more particularly to discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ under the character of a *lamb slain*, a lamb made a sacrifice. And as some of you are this evening to partake of the supper that is instituted as a memorial of Christ's sufferings ; so I shall briefly set before you, as the time will allow me, the greatness of those sufferings of our Saviour, who was ordain'd *to bear our sins in his own body upon the cross*ⁱ. The character that is here given him, represents to us his sufferings as those of a *lamb slain* for us^k. The types under the law endured death ; so *the lamb of God* hath suffered death : he hath endured sufferings agreeable to the greatness of his love, and to the greatness of his undertaking, which was to make satisfaction for sin. His sufferings will appear therefore to us very great, and that he deserves the character of the *lamb slain*, or the sacrifice ; if we consider,

ⁱ 1 Pet. 2. 24.

^k Rev. 13. 8.

1. The sufferings themselves.
2. The occasion of his sufferings.
3. The character of the person who endured these sufferings; what, and how great he was. And,
4. From whom he suffered those great torments and miseries which he underwent.

I. Let us take a view of the sufferings themselves. The scripture gives you an account of them. The evangelists tell you after what manner Christ was taken, arraigned, accused, condemned, and put to death; and what were the circumstances of his sufferings upon that occasion, which greatly aggravated them. The apostles preached *Christ crucified*¹: and this is a great part of their doctrine, and the main point thereof; all the other parts of the christian religion have a reference thereunto, and center therein. And John, in the revelation, beheld him as a *lamb slain*; and considered all his glory, and the glory of his church, as resulting from the merit of his blood. It is indeed a matter of the greatest consideration. Let us therefore take notice of these sufferings of our Lord, and we shall find that they were very great; in that they were very numerous, and extended to all the capacities that he had of suffering; and very great in regard of the intenseness of the sorrow, of the pain, and of the torment that he endured.

1 Cor. i. 23.

They were great, I say, in that he suffered many things at once, and by the various capacities he had of suffering. He suffered in his soul, and he suffered in his body. All the faculties of his mind were filled with affliction and torment: and the like may be said of his body too. God is pleased in afflicting his people in this world, to mix abundance of mercy oftentimes with their trials; and yet we find one affliction, if it be great, very hard to be endured. But what was the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the capacities of his soul and body were filled with torment and pain; with sorrow and misery? he tells his disciples, at the approach of his sufferings, that *his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*. And the psalmist, speaking prophetically of the sorrows of our Lord, says, *reproach broke his heart^m: his heart was melted like wax, in the midst of his bowelsⁿ*. Which words represent the anguish of his mind, as well as the agonies of his body. There must needs be abundance of sorrow, that could throw him into a *sweat of blood^o*, before his enemies laid hands upon him, while he was ruminating upon his sufferings in the garden; and while his soul languished under the mighty burden so far, that it was necessary that an angel should come to

^m Psal. 69. 20.ⁿ Psal. 22, 14.^o Luke 22. 44.

comfort him. Not that our Redeemer had any criminal backwardness, any unreasonable or sinful fear: but this was to shew the infirmity and weakness of human nature; and that our Lord was made mortal, that he might be capable of sinking and dying under the weight of sufferings, which were to be laid upon him. The sorrows of his soul were capable of greatly afflicting his body; and it is said he was *crucified in weakness*^p: Here was a natural frailty, frailty of human nature, tho there was no criminal or moral infirmity that did attend him. He knew what it was to be filled with sorrow: *He endured the shame of the cross*^q, the reproaches thereof. And that which is a great consolation to persons under sufferings, the supports of the divine hand, our Lord was so far deprived of, that he was to have no sensible comfort from the refreshing presence of his Father; therefore he cries out as *forsoaken of him*^r. I only speak of this at present to shew you, that as there were various sufferings upon his mind, so likewise upon his body. He was not only abused with words, but with blows, in the open view of all spectators that throng'd about the public courts of Judgment. He was buffeted and spit upon: which shews the great barbarity and cruelty of his persecutors. He had a mock robe of royalty put on, a reed in his hand instead

^p 2 Cor. 13. 4.

^q Heb. 12. 2.

^r Mat. 27. 46.

of a sceptre, and a crown of thorns upon his head. He was conducted without the gates of Jerusalem, to the place of common execution, as a publick spectacle, in the view of all that came to Calvary to see him suffer. And there his head being crowned with thorns, his hands, and his feet, and his side, were all pierced; that it might appear there was an intire effusion of his blood. For he was to be offered a sacrifice; and that must be by shedding of blood. Thus abandon'd by his friends, and pursued cruelly by his enemies, he endured the most ignominious and painful treatment. But it is impossible to describe the sufferings of our Lord in terms so proper and elegant as those in which the Holy Spirit has represented them; particularly by the pen of the psalmist, and the prophet Isaiah. In the 22d psalm: *I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me, laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head; saying, he trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him^s. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up, like a potsherd: and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me unto the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me, the assembly of*

^s Ver. 6, 7. 8.

the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots for my vesture^{}. And in like manner in the 52d and 53d chapters of Isaiah, you have a description of the sufferings of our Saviour. Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. Many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marr'd more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men[†]. He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and, when we all see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities[‡], &c. The death of Christ was most ignominious, painful and lingering: he was wounded in the most nervous parts of the body, and, consequently, those which were most sensible of pain; his hands and feet were pierced with nails. This, indeed, was ordinary and common so far. But then there were circumstances relating*

^{*} Ver. 14—18.

[†] Chap. 52. 13, 14.

[‡] Chap. 53. 2—5.

to our Lord Jesus Christ, as will appear hereafter, which made his sufferings greater than ordinary. But it already appears that they were not only very numerous, but exceeding grievous, as to the kind of them, and intense as to the degree, especially the sufferings of the cruel and cursed death of the cross, with common malefactors; and thus to be exposed, and die in the midst of a multitude of spectators with so much shame and ignominy. But let us consider,

2. The occasion of the sufferings of our Lord. And this will still make further evident to us the mighty aggravations which attended them, above the sufferings of others.

(1.) On the part of man. The occasion of Christ's sufferings was false accusation. And it must needs have been a great and uncommon sorrow and trouble to one that loved holiness and purity, as our Lord did, to be accused of the grossest and most enormous crimes in the world. Therefore he complains by the prophet, *false witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not of*^v. *He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*^w. But notwithstanding the purity of his conversation, and that *he went about doing good*^x, his enemies falsely accused him, and endeavoured to represent him as the most odious of men: and by exciting the people to desire his crucifixion, and to prefer

^v Psal. 35. 11.

^w 1 Pet. 2. 22.

^x Acts 10. 38.

Barabbas's life before his, they declare him the greater; malefactor of the two ^y. 'Tis true, that innocency is a great support to a man under sufferings, when he considers that he shall be cleared before the tribunal of God, tho he be falsely accused and condemned by men. But, in itself, it is a great trial to one who loves holiness and purity, to one who regards *a good name better than precious ointment* ^z; as the wise man speaks, to be esteemed guilty of the things which his righteous soul abhors. It is part of a man's duty to value a good name; and a virtuous mind will always value it: and therefore it must be a great occasion of sorrow, for one so perfectly innocent as our blessed Lord, to be so scandalously and falsely accused. By how much the greater the crimes were which were laid to his charge, the greater must be his suffering. But our Saviour being substituted as a sacrifice, as we shall shew hereafter, fell under these circumstances. And, whereas others are comforted by extraordinary supports; this was the time of his being deserted, and left without comfort: which made him cry out, *my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me* ^a. If you ask, what were the crimes laid to his charge; why, they are the greatest, and the most reproachful in the world. They alledged that he was *an impostor*, that he was a blas-

^y Mat. 15. 11.^z Eccles. 7. 1.^a Mat. 27. 46.

phemer, and a *factious person*; that he went to undermine the government under which he lived, and, under a specious pretence, to set up another.

That he was *an impostor*, in the circumstances in which it was charged upon our Saviour, was certainly one of the vilest accusations that could be. They said that he was *not the son of God*^b, as he made himself to be; and, consequently, that he would, in the name of God, establish a doctrine that was not true. This was to subvert religion itself, and to put the souls of men out of the way of salvation. The Jews knew that their religion was received of God: and, by accusing Christ as an impostor, they represented him as one that went about to subvert the true religion, and to establish his own fancies and inventions instead thereof. Our Lord came indeed to abolish some part of their religion, that part which was ceremonial and figurative: but the substance of these figures still took place; *the body was of Christ*^c, as the apostle says to the Colossians.

Another thing they charge him with is, that he was a *blasphemer*. Our Lord indeed, in vindication of himself, declared that it was true that he was the son of God. And considering the good proofs he had given that he really was so; this aggravates the heinousness of the charge brought against him.

^b John 19. 7.^c Col. 2. 17.

Mat. 26. 65. *The high priest rent his clothes, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses; behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.* They would have him guilty of the highest blasphemy in representing himself as the son of God. And herein lies the greatness of his sufferings; that they should charge him with blasphemy, when he was really what he declared himself to be, and had given sufficient proof of it.

Then they would suggest that he was a *factionous and seditious person*; one, who was going about to overturn the government under which he lived, and to set up himself: therefore they tell Pilate, *he was not Cæsar's friend, if he released Jesus*^d. This was to bring an odium upon him from the powers of this world.

Thus they represented him as designing the destruction of mens souls, by spiritual imposture; and of their bodies, by engaging them in factions against their superiors. Our Lord Jesus might therefore well complain, that *they laid to his charge things that he knew not*^e; since the religion he preached was founded upon the scripture, and he prov'd his mission by his miracles; since the whole tenor of his life shewed his design was to do men good, and since he particularly laboured to persuade

^d John 19. 12.

| ^e Psal. 35. 11.

them to be peaceable and faithful in the several relations they bear to each other. The whole of his doctrine and conversation were becoming his profession as the messenger of God. The business of the Son of God, in this lower world, was to reform and to redeem sinners. And our Lord Jesus not only declared that he was the son of God, but proved that he was so, in that he ratified his mission and holy doctrine by the performance of the most wonderful and convincing miracles: therefore there was no ground for them to say he blasphemed. Nor was there any colour for the laying of faction and sedition to his charge. He was so far from deserving an accusation of this nature, that he slipped away from the people when they would have set him up a temporal prince^f; and shewed that he was not come to erect a throne, in this world at present, any other than in the consciences of men. There was not the least pretence for faction and sedition: for our Saviour declared, that instead of seeking of temporal honour and glory, he came to die, to lay down his life for sinners; and acted agreeably to the declaration he made.

Thus Christ's sufferings were great, in regard of men, who. falsely accused him. But they were great, likewise,

^f John 6. 15.

(2.) In regard of the occasion of them, which God had respect unto: namely, the making satisfaction for sin; the meriting of grace and glory for his people; and the setting before them the most illustrious example of patience and meekness under his sufferings.

We may easily imagine our Lord's sufferings were great, when he, who was so extraordinary and excellent a person, was loaded with such false and vile accusations: but they will appear much greater, if we consider what was the true design of them, on the part of God. He came to lay down his life for sinners: this abundantly shews the greatness of his sufferings. Consider what is the justice of God; what his holiness: how terrible a punishment of sin that justice had threatned, even eternal wrath; the *worm that never dies, and the fire that shall never be quenched*^g. Now, if Christ was come to make satisfaction for sin; you may imagine his sufferings must needs be very great, if you consider what a multitude of sins were laid upon him, charged upon him by imputation; *who was made sin for us, that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*^h. And this design, that he should be made a sacrifice, shews that his sufferings must needs be extraordinary great: for the hatred of God to sin, was most eminently

^g Mark 9. 44.

| ^h 2 Cor. 5. 21.

declared

declared by his sufferings; what he suffered on all accounts considered, being equivalent to that eternal misery which we ought to have endured, and must otherwise have suffered.

Farther, let us consider the merit of Christ's sufferings: and this will shew the greatness of them. As sin is a great evil, and the consequences of it from which we are delivered are very dreadful; so the privileges to which we are intitled, by the merit of Christ's sufferings, are very great. To be changed and reformed, to have communion with God here, and the enjoyment of him, for ever, a title to crowns and robes, to those glorious mansions which our Lord is gone to prepare, to unspeakable happiness and an eternal weight of glory; this is what our blessed Redeemer merited by his sufferings. The price must be very great, that procured such a purchase: consequently the sufferings of our Lord Jesus, as they were satisfactory for so much sin, and meritorious of so much good, we may easily collect were very great.

Again; according to his character as the great high priest, the head of his church, the ruler and governour; the captain of their salvation; it was fit he should be *made perfect through sufferings*ⁱ: as upon other accounts so upon this, that he might set them

ⁱ Heb. 2. 10.

an example. Our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore set before us as the great object unto whom we are to look under our sufferings: *looking unto Jesus*, says the author to the Hebrews, *the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame*^k. We are to look to him as our great pattern; *He suffered, setting us an example, that we should walk in his steps*^l. Which shews that his sufferings were extraordinary great; as well as that he behaved himself under them after an extraordinary manner. Abraham's great faith is set before us as an extraordinary pattern. Our Lord is *the captain of our salvation*, and a pattern of sufferings. Why? Because his sufferings were extraordinary great, and he behaved himself under them after an extraordinary manner. So that seeing the design of his sufferings was to make satisfaction for sin, and to merit for us grace and glory, and to make himself a pattern fit to be set before his people; all these characters required that his sufferings should be very great, and transcend the sufferings of all others whatsoever.

3. If we consider his person; this will shew that his sufferings were extraordinary great. The higher in state and dignity any person is, the greater the affliction, if he be brought into a condition of misery and tor-

^k Heb. 12. 2.

| ^l 1 Pet. 2. 21.

ment. Our Lord was infinitely high, in regard to his divine nature: and tho that could not suffer; yet the human nature being assumed unto the divine, his sufferings may be called the sufferings of God. Acts 20. 28. *Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.* He is rewarded, because he so deeply humbled himself; and *became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.* Therefore hath God highly exalted him, Phil. 2. 8, 9. Thus the apostle shews that the dignity of his person renders his sufferings so very great. Consider farther, not only his nature, as God; but his dignity, as mediator. The office he bears, shews that his sufferings must have been great in proportion. He stood in the gap; and consequently was to bear the wrath of God as a sacrifice, as you have heard before, as well as to intercede by his prayers, by the plea of his blood, when once it was shed. He was greater than all the prophets, priests, and princes too, that ever appeared in the world. For a prince to be treated with the utmost ignominy and contempt, to be treated as a malefactor, and to be put to the greatest torments and miseries; this is highly resented amongst men: by how much more noble the person is, by how much the greater his quality and office is, by so much the greater are the sufferings accounted to be. The dignity therefore of our Lord's person and office,

office, do certainly very much aggravate his sufferings.

But farther; if you consider him in regard of the frame and disposition of his body and soul, the same thing will result to your view. As to the faculties and powers of his soul; he was undoubtedly, in that respect, made very capable of suffering. And his love being exceeding ardent towards God, and towards men; it must deeply touch a soul so formed as his, to see men sinning after such a manner as they did, in the many injuries they offered to him: this made so deep an impression upon his pure and tender mind, that he cries out upon the cross, *Father forgive them; for they know not what they do*^m. His extraordinary love to God, and to the souls of men, made it bitter and grievous to him to see sin at any time committed. And therefore a little before he suffered, he *wept over* the iniquities of *Jerusalem*ⁿ with tenderness and compassion: how much more then must their most brutish and aggravated transgressions affect him in his dying moments? Moreover, the greatness of his knowledge increased his sufferings: he knowing before what punishment his father had designed; knowing what he had undertaken, and that it was necessary for him to undergo such a plunge of sorrows, such a baptism of sufferings^o;

^m Luke 23. 34.

ⁿ Luke 19. 41.

^o Luke 12. 50.

that

that he was to drink of so bitter *a cup*, and that it was impossible it should *pass from him* ^p. Necessary, because all mankind must otherwise perish: and such was the benignity of his gracious soul, that he had rather suffer a thousand torments, than that man should go without a redeemer. Certainly the agitations of his mind must, on this occasion, be inexpressibly great; tho there was no sin committed by him, no treachery in his heart, or guile in his mouth, when he was surrounded with abuse and violence in every form, and under the greatest internal distress.

If you consider the texture or frame of his body; being sent by the father, he had a *body prepared* for sufferings^q; it must therefore be very capable of suffering. And the temperance and abstemiousness of his life, the regularity of his conversation, must render him the more passive, the more capable of suffering; and that especially, when he was in the vigor of his age. He was not much more than thirty years old when he suffered; a time of life when nature is in its greatest strength, when the senses are most lively and vigorous; which must encrease his pain, and cause him to languish the longer upon the cross. And it seems his vigor was such, that he hung a considerable time without dying; notwithstanding he

^p Mat. 20. 22. and Chap. 26. 42. | ^q Heb. 10. 5.

had such extraordinary exercises in his soul, as well as torments in his body. If we consider all these things together, we shall soon perceive that the person of our Saviour was adapted and disposed for suffering, and was capable of it more than any other could possibly be. And,

4. Consider from whom these sufferings came; that there was a conspiracy of men and devils against him: it was *the hour, and power of darkness*^r, as our Lord himself declares. There were the greatest efforts of hell; and therefore our Saviour is represented by the apostle as *triumphing over principalities and powers upon the cross*^s. There was the greatest obstinacy and malice of his enemies, and the weakness and pusillanimity of his friends. One of his disciples was so treacherous as to betray him; another was so weak and cowardly as to deny him, and that with cursing and swearing; the rest forsook him, and fled. Thus was our Lord abandoned by them all, and left as it were alone, when his sufferings came upon him in the most tumultuous and terrible manner. Peter indeed had said, *tho all should forsake thee; yet will not I*^r. Yet this was the person who denied him; and was, by the look of his Lord, melted into tears. He had a peculiar tenderness for Peter; he saw his sin and fall, and saw his grief and sorrow: and

^r Luke 22. 33.

^s Col. 2. 15.

^r Mat. 26. 33.

all this in the midst of his own distresses. These things, and the calamities he foresaw that would befall Jerusalem, his country, his kindred, the nation in which he was born, and to whom he was allied; all these render his sufferings exceeding great. And, as hath been intimated already, the hand of his father was against him: *he made his soul an offering for sin*^t; *he was smitten, stricken of God, and afflicted*^u. And who knows how terrible his sufferings were on this account? It is true, he knew he was pleasing his father while suffering upon the cross; yet no doubt, unspeakable sorrow and dejection of spirit attended him while all consolation was withholden from him. Our Lord, tho innocent, yet standing in our stead, endured, you see, most wonderful sufferings upon our account; and was so far deserted of the father, that he had not that consolation and joy which another might expect in that hour.

Thus have I, as briefly as I well could, given you some representation of the greatness of our Saviour's sufferings. Let me make a brief improvement of what has been said, and conclude for the present. Thus was *the lamb of God slain*, that he might *take away the sin of the world*. You see how well this character suits our blessed Saviour, who, by such hands, was so wounded and tortured in body, endured such infamy and reproach

^t Isa. 53. 10.| ^u Ver. 4.

on his character, and such various torments, in his soul ; and all this with so much meekness, patience, and resignation of spirit. Hence we see,

1. The great love of the father, that he would provide such a lamb. What manner of love is this, that God should *not spare his own son, but freely give him up to die for us* ^v ?

2. You here behold the great love of the Son, that he would not spare himself, but willingly engaged to become a sacrifice ; and, in due time, offered himself upon the cross. Oh, what is all the love of creatures, in comparison to the love of God for poor fallen man ! *For a good man* ^w, *for a friend, some would even dare to die* ^x. But who would die for sinners, for enemies, for rebels ? that the Son of God should assume human nature to become a sacrifice for our sins ; what manner of love is this ? love that raises admiration in the minds of those who consider it ; so as that they have reason to say, *it bath heights and depths, lengths and breadths that pass knowledge* ^y, and which will be the subject of eternal Hallelujahs.

3. What an example does our Saviour hereby set us of sufferings ? Is there any room for us to murmur, when under all his torments there was no repining, no

^v Rom. 8. 32.

^w Rom. 5. 7.

^x John 15. 13.

^y Eph. 3. 18, 19.

indecent word dropped from him? Should not we behave ourselves like the followers and disciples of our great leader and master? we, whose sufferings are much less, who have deserved all that we suffer, and must have endured eternal misery if our Lord had not suffered upon the cross for us; we, to whom afflictions are so necessary to make us conformable to the holiness of God. There is certainly no room for our complaining; and especially when we consider, that whereas our Saviour was deserted under his sufferings, we have the promise of the Spirit of God to uphold us under ours, if we apply ourselves to him as we ought to do.

4. This shews us how we should hate and abhor sin. Shall we put our Saviour to grief again? shall we commit sin, which hath cost him so much pain and torment to expiate? how ungrateful is this! if we love Christ, we should hate sin, which he so much hates; and, to redeem us from which, he would endure the painful and shameful death of the cross. We should be revenged upon our iniquities, as the weapons, the instruments which smote our Lord Jesus, which wounded him, and slew him after so cruel a manner.

5. What encouragement is here to poor sinners, who are burdened under the sense of their sins, to come to Christ for mercy; to come to this *lamb of God*, to *take away* their *sins*? whosoever looks to him by

faith, shall have eternal life. Here is a sacrifice; here is the atonement. Here therefore is a *door of hope* opened. This should direct us likewise, under all the remaining power of our corruptions, to have recourse continually to that *fountain which is opened to wash us from sin and from uncleanness*²; *Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.* There is no other oblation, no other sacrifice but this.

6. How should this endear to us the remembrance of Christ's sufferings; those memorials of his sufferings we have in the holy supper? If we love our Saviour, we should come when he calls us to celebrate his praises; we should come hungry and thirsting to his table. If we are negligent, and absent ourselves from hence, or come, with cold and indifferent dispositions of mind, don't we thereby discover great unkindness to our Lord Jesus Christ? and how unworthy is it that we should love him so little who is so infinitely lovely; and to whom we are so much obliged? It behoves us therefore, if we wou'd act suitably to his character, to the obligations we owe him, and indeed to our own interest and advantage, *to sit under his shadow with great delight, that his fruit may be sweet to our taste*². You may hear the voice of John the baptist, and of our Lord himself, as it were, from the table, saying,

² Zech. 13. 1.

| ² Can. 2. 3.

behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. There is the voice of our Lord, the voice of our beloved himself^b : for it is he who invites us to eat of the bread which he hath prepared, and drink of the wine which he hath mingled^c ; to partake, by faith, of the great things he hath procured and purchased for us ; to live upon him who is our life^d, who is able to sustain us, to feed and nourish us, to console and strengthen our souls here ; and who, after having treated us in the kindest manner upon earth, hath provided a nobler and more lasting entertainment for us in the kingdom of heaven. They are happy who are thus treated in a state of grace : but they shall be advanced to a much greater degree of happiness in a state of glory. Here we are invited to feed by faith upon our crucified Redeemer, and to adore *the lamb that was slain*^e ; but how much more exalted will our enjoyments and our praises be in the kingdom of heaven, when we come to partake of the *marriage-supper of the lamb*, and when his church shall be made entirely ready^f, and so rendered capable of enjoying a state of perfection in glory ?

^b Cant. 5. 2.

^c Prov. 9. 5.

^d Col. 3. 4.

^e Rev. 5. 12.

^f Rev. 19. 7, 9.



S E R M O N XI.

The end of Christ's sufferings
consider'd.

Preach'd at

PINNERS-HALL, Jan. 27. 1704-5.
on a sacramental occasion.

JOHN i. 29.

*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto
him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God
which taketh away the sin of the world.*

The second S E R M O N on this text.



IN a discourse on the former part of these words, I have already given some account of the connection of them with what goes before, and explained the meaning of this character that is given to our Lord Jesus; *the lamb of God*. And now my business will be to treat of the other part of the words, which signify his undertaking.

taking. The great thing this *lamb of God* came about, was *to take away the sin of the world*. John the baptist is the person who gives our Lord this character, and this account of the great work he was to do. John the baptist, I say; who lived in an intermediate dispensation, which partook partly of the Old Testament, and partly of the New. Partly of the Old Testament; because he was born and brought up under that: but partly of the New; because he was Christ's immediate forerunner, and did baptize persons in the name of Jesus; a new ordinance being instituted to usher in the ministration of the Messiah; and the people who submitted to it being required to make a profession of their faith in Christ the Messiah, who was now coming to manifest himself to the world. John refused to take that honour to himself which the people would have put upon him: for the people not only took him to be a prophet, but imagined he was the Messiah, for they expected the coming of the Messiah about that time. He thrusts away this honour from himself, and tells them he was *not worthy to bear the shoes of him that was truly the Christ*^s: and our Lord appearing the next day after John had declared himself in this manner, he directs the eyes and the hearts of the people to him, who he had said before was greater than

^s Ver. 27.

himself. " There is the great person, says
 " he, concerning whom I was speaking.
 " There is the Messiah, the saviour of sin-
 " ners. *Behold the lamb of God that takes*
 " *away the sin of the world.* This is the
 " person of whom I have been speaking,
 " and to whom I give honour myself, and
 " to whom I direct you to ascribe it."

I have considered the character John gives of our Saviour when he calls him *the lamb of God*; and have shewed you he is called a lamb both in respect of his sufferings as a sacrifice, and in respect of the manner of his behaviour under them. In respect of his sufferings as a sacrifice, he is fitly called *a lamb*; for this was a kind of sacrifice early instituted. The first we read of was that of Abel, which typified the Messiah: *he offered of the firstlings of his flock*^h. And you know the paschal-lamb was another eminent type of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his sufferings. The daily sacrifice was likewise a type of him; the lamb that was offered for the continual burnt offering. Therefore, it was very proper to give our Lord, the antitype of these characters, the name of *the lamb of God*. It is as much as to say; this is he who is the antitype of all those legal sacrifices that were offered to God, as prefiguring the true sacrifice which should be offered *once for all*ⁱ, and to make effectual

^h Gen. 4. 4.

| ⁱ Heb. 7. 27.

expiation of guilt; this is *the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.*^k I have shewn you likewise that John the evangelist, as well as John the baptist, take delight to describe Christ under this character; therefore it is often used in the book of the Revelation. And the apostle Peter uses the same when he tells us, that *we are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot*^l. Not only our Lord's sacrifice, but the manner of his sufferings are hereby represented, according to the remark of the prophet Isaiah: *He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth*^m; to represent the meekness, the humility, the patience, the resignation, wherewith our Lord offered himself. I have insisted particularly upon his offering himself as a sacrifice, and shewn the greatness of his sufferings, as his blood was shed upon the cross; and that under several heads.

I now proceed to the *undertaking* of our Lord Jesus, the end and design of his sufferings, which was *to take away the sin of the world*. And here to avoid mistakes, I must insist particularly upon each of these terms. I must endeavour to shew you,

^k Rev. 13. 8.

^l 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19.

^m Isa. 53. 7.

- I. What is signify'd by *the world*.
- II. What by *the sin of the world*.
- III. *How* our Lord Jesus Christ *takes away the sin of the world*.

I. What is signified by the world. *The world* is a term variously used in the scripture, and in common conversation, as every one knows. Sometimes it signifies the whole creation, the whole universe. So in the 1st of John, it is said, the world was made by our Lord Jesus Christ. *He came into the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not* ⁿ. And so in several other places of the scripture. Sometimes it signifies the inhabitants of the world; and comprehends both angels and men. So our Lord Jesus shall judge the world. *God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world by the man Christ Jesus* ^o. And it is said, *the saints shall judge the world* ^p. The apostle tells us they shall judge *angels* as well as men; and no body doubts but our Lord Jesus Christ will have both before his tribunal, both angels and men. Sometimes by *the world* only men are signified. And so in various places in scripture, we find it used in speaking of mankind. It is evident the sins of angels cannot be understood by *the sin*

ⁿ John 1. 10.

^o Acts 17. 31.

^p 1 Cor. 6. 2, 3.

of the world^a: for God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell; and they are reserved in chains of darkness, unto the judgment of the great day^r. By the world therefore in our text must be signified the inhabitants of this world: and it must not be extended to the inhabitants of the whole universe; particularly not to angels, tho they are rational creatures, and have sinned; but to the inhabitants of this lower world, for our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to make himself an offering for the sins of angels. He took not on him the nature of angels, for he was not to be their redeemer, but it was the nature of men; he was a man of the seed of Abraham^f, and of the seed of David, according to the flesh^s. But then when we understand the world to signify the inhabitants of this earth, rational creatures that inhabit here, yet it is to be distinguished into various acceptations. And here I must desire your particular attention, because the right explication of the text may depend hereupon.

I. Sometimes it is taken universally, as you see in Rom. 3. 6. *How then shall God judge the world.* This must comprehend all men, tho it comprehends angels too; for God will judge all men universally none excepted. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ^t.* So in that forecited text,

^a 2 Pet. 2. 4.

^s Jude 6.

^f Heb. 2. 16.

^s Rom. 1. 3.

^t 2 Cor. 5. 10.

1 Cor. 6. 2. where it is said *the saints shall judge the world*; it is meant that they shall attend our Lord Jesus Christ, and have a place of eminent dignity and honour at that great day, wherein he will judge all mankind. But *all shall appear before him to receive according to the things done in the body, whether they be good, or bad* ^u. And the process of judgment as it is represented by our Saviour, shews that it extends to all universally. His separating the sheep from the goats; his pronouncing a happy sentence on the one sort, and a sentence of everlasting destruction and misery on the other ^v; shews that they are all the objects of his judicial authority at the great day of his appearance. Then,

2. *The world* is sometimes taken generally, and not universally, not for every man of the world, but I say generally, for the generality of men, or the greatest part of them. Thus frequently in the scripture the word is used; and to make it clear, let me produce three or four instances. John 14. 17. Christ was promising the spirit. Says he, *even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knew him, but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. The world*, that is the generality of men: some did receive the spirit; but they were only a few in compa-

^u Cor. 5. 10.

1 ^v Mat. 25.

rison of the rest; therefore the generality are called the *world*. So Rev. 13. 3. *all the world wondred after the beast*; that is the generality of men, where the power of the beast was extended: the generality of men wondred after the beast, and worship'd him, submitted to false worship, and devoted themselves to the service of the beast. *We know we are of God*, says the apostle, 1 John 5. 19. *and all the world lyes in wickedness^w, or in the wicked one^x*: that is, the generality of mankind; for Christ's flock is but a *little flock*, in comparison of the rest; the whole world lyeth in wickedness. So our Lord says, that *he prayed not for the world, but for his disciples^y*. The whole prayer he then put up was for his people, for those that should believe in his name: but the generality of men are signified by *the world* in that text.

Sometimes by *the world* taken in a general sense, is signified the Gentiles. As Rom. 11. 12. where the apostle is speaking of the blindness, and hardness of the hearts of the Jews, he tells us, that *the cutting off the Jews should be the enriching of the Gentiles, and the fall of them the riches of the world*. So that by *the world* there is meant the Gentiles in opposition to the Jews; and in 1 Tim. 3. 16. *Great is the mystery of godliness,*

^w Luke 12. 32.

^x ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ.

^y John 17. 9.

God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. Preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world, i. e. believed on by the Gentiles, which was one great wonder, and a great part of the mystery of godliness, as appears by other discourses of the same apostle. But then, I say, this may be comprehended under the general sense, in which the world is taken for the generality of men.

3. It is taken indefinitely for men, without determining the number. And there are various instances of this, as in John 3. 16, 17. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.* In this place it seems evident, that it ought to be taken in an indefinite sense; for it cannot be so properly said of men in general, as men indefinitely. This is intimated by our Saviour, when he says, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth: it is intimated by the establishment of this condition, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* All the world are not saved; but *whosoever believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall be saved.* That is certain: *God sent not his son into the*
2
world

world to condemn the world: this was not the work of our Lord Jesus Christ when *manifest in the flesh*: but that *the world through him might be saved*; that is, that men might be saved by him after this manner. Thus likewise in John 4. 42. he is called *the Saviour of the world*. And it may be particularly signified hereby, that his salvation was to extend to the Gentiles; which was a doctrine the Jews could no well digest. So in John 6. 33. it is said *he gave life to the world*; that is to men. And that it is taken sometimes thus indefinitely, is evident from Joel 2. 28. where there is the like term used. *I will pour out my spirit* (says God) *upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, &c.* Now it is evident by what the apostle says in the beginning of the history of the Acts^z, of the application of that prophecy to that time, that it was in a special manner fulfilled when those extraordinary gifts were given, and that it must have its fuller accomplishment in the effusion of God's grace among the people of the world, Jews and Gentiles. God did not pour out his spirit then, nor hath he since upon *all men* universally; never upon men in general; but he hath poured it out upon men indefinitely, whether young or old, Jew or

^z Acts 2. 16, 17.

Gentile. He hath poured it out indifferently upon men without distinction of their being *Jews or Gentiles, Barbarians, Scythians, bond or free, young or old*^a. So that *world*, may sometimes in scripture be taken after an indefinite manner.

4. It is sometimes taken (as I may term it) chronically, or with respect to the time. So various texts in scripture may be brought wherein this word is thus used. In 1 John 2. 2. it is said of Christ *he was the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*. Where in all appearance the apostle's meaning is, that he was not a propitiation only for the sins of those that were then alive, and that believed in his time, but, for the sins of others in former generations of the world, and for the sins also of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. That may be comprehended also in it, because many of the Jews opposed the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles. Therefore the apostle was willing to inculcate this truth. He was *a propitiation for the sins of the world*; for the sins of Gentiles as well as of Jews. So Isa. 53. 6. *The Lord hath laid on him*, says the prophet, *the iniquity of us all*. Wherein he may seem to comprehend those under the Old Testament, as well as those under the New: for they were saved by faith in the blood of Christ.

^a Col. 3. 11.

He was *a lamb slain from the foundation of the world*^b, not only with respect to God's decree, but with a regard to the efficacy of his sacrifice, for those that believed in him, who should be offered in the fulness of time.

5. Sometimes it is taken hyperbolically, concerning a few men in comparison of the whole world; who yet may be called *the world* because they are considered as a great number in a certain nation. Our Lord Jesus Christ in John 18. 20. says, *he ever spoke openly to the world*; because he spoke to a great number of the Jews. So *a world of iniquity* is said to be *in the tongue*^c; that is abundance of iniquity. Thus in common conversation, we say there were *a world* of people, when we mean only that there were a great number. And so it was said by the Pharisees among themselves, John 12. 19. relating to the prevalency of Christ's doctrine, *perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold the world is gone after him*. So the apostles are said to subvert *the world*; *these are they which have turned the world upside-down*^d; that is they have engaged a great many proselytes in several countries, tho those who received the gospel were far less in number than the rest of mankind.

Now after this explication of the several senses of the term *world* in scripture; we are

^b Rev. 13. 8.

^c James 3. 6.

^d Acts 17. 6.

to consider what is here meant by it in our text : *Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.* This cannot be said of *the world* universally considered. As it hath not regard to angels, so it is evident that the sins of all mankind are not taken away. There are many that *dye in their sins*. And our Lord tells the Jews that would be the consequence with all those who did not believe in him ; they must dye. *Unless you believe that I am he, ye shall dye in your sins* ^e. The baptist here speaks of Christ under the character of a sacrifice, one that had offered himself to that end and purpose, *to take away the sins of the world*. If any say that it may respect all mankind with this condition, that they believe ; that is certain, that *whosoever believes shall be saved* ^f. Whosoever believes in Christ, *his sins shall be taken away*. But they themselves must grant it cannot absolutely have regard to all mankind. It cannot absolutely have regard to all, but only to such as believe : and these are but a small part of mankind.

Again. It cannot be taken generally, any more than universally. For, as hath been already observed, the generality of men have not their sins taken away. And if it be said that the generality, if they believe, shall have their sins taken away ; the same answer may be returned as before. They

^e John 8. 21, 24.

^f John 3. 15.

may say the universality, all mankind that believe, shall have their sins taken away; but then this restrains the term, because there are very few that believe in comparison of the whole world. *We know*, says the apostle John, *that we are of God, but the whole world lies in wickedness* ^g. This may, it is true, be taken hyperbolically, and so signify, that our Lord Jesus takes away the sins of many: for he does indeed constitute as it were a new world, especially when we consider those that are redeemed by his blood in all ages of the world. These make a great number: and our Lord *will come with ten thousands of his saints* ^h, a great number not only of angels but of saints. Thus it is said prophetically, that *thousands of thousands ministred unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him* ⁱ. There are in the various ages of the world a great number of those that *are truly reconciled unto God, by the death* of our Lord Jesus Christ ^k. And all those that *are redeemed unto God, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*, will be a very considerable number when they are collected together. These will be the inhabitants of the new world, which our Lord Jesus will constitute, after the heavens and the earth which now are, *are dissolved* ^l according to his word.

^g 1 John 5. 19.^h Jude 14.ⁱ Dan. 7. 10. Rev. 5. 11. |^k Rom. 5. 10.^l 2 Pet. 3. 12, 13.

But that which may comprehend these things, and therefore seems to be the clearest sense, is, that the term ought to be taken indefinitely. *Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*; the sins of men, without determining what number of men; takes away the sins of men: not the sins of angels, but the sins of men; not the sins of men of one nation only, but that takes away the sins of the Gentiles as well as Jews: not the sins of those that live in one age only, or under one dispensation, but those that live in another, under the law, or under the gospel. *This is he that takes away the sins of men*, without determining whether the greater or whether the lesser number; for there are other texts that do sufficiently determine that; and shew us what is necessary to salvation, and after what manner our Lord takes away the sins of men. So that I do not see that from this text the number, whether greater or lesser, of those whose sins are taken away, can be argued: but that the design of this character is to shew that our Lord Jesus, is the one only Mediator, the great intercessor, the great sacrifice, who was capable only of taking away the sin of man, without determining the number of those whose sins should be taken away eventually. This sense seems to be very large, and comprehensive of some of the things that have been already spoken; and I think may well be counted unexceptionable,

unexceptionable, because it is so common in the holy scripture, to speak after this indefinite manner; as appears by the texts that have been already cited.

II. We are to enquire what is to be understood by *the sin of the world*. Some think it is a particular kind of sin, of which the whole world is guilty; namely, original sin: because, say they, no other sin can be so properly called *the sin of the world*, as original sin. And hence they imagine that our Lord Jesus, tho he hath not taken away all the sins of mankind, yet hath taken away the sin of the whole world; that is, the original sin; and thus they endeavour to extend the term *world* to signify the world universally. But I think this is not the sense of this text, because there is no other scripture that I know off, that does support such a sense as this, that our Lord Jesus hath taken away original sin from *the world*. For, if so; then when men dye in their sins, as the scripture declares they do, the greatest part of them, it may be said then, that they dye without original sin upon them. Besides, if our Lord takes away original sin, it must be either that he takes away the corruption of our nature, in regard of the guilt, or in regard of the filth and impurity, the power of sin. If he takes away original sin, in regard of the guilt of it; then this is inconsistent with

what the scripture every where speaks, concerning Christ's taking away sin, which is a removal not only of the guilt, but of the filth of sin, the power of sin. The power of sin is subdued, as well as the guilt of it is taken away ; the one indeed is done perfectly, and the other carried on gradually ; but however, there is his operation upon both accounts. And therefore, if original sin, as to the guilt of it were taken away from all mankind ; then the power of it would be subdued, at least in some good degree in all mankind. On the contrary, we find that the wicked are condemned, as being under the guilt of all their sins, dying in their sins of whatsoever kind, if they believe not in our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore there is no appearance of one part of their sin being taken away, and the other part of it remaining upon them ; for then Christ would be to them a partial Saviour ; save them from one part of their sin, the guilt of it, and punish them, and let them sink under the other for ever : and I think the scripture no where speaks like this. If it be argued, that original sin must be hereby meant, because it is not said, that he takes away the *sins* of the world, but *the sin* of the world, and sin seems to determine it to a particular sin ; there are other texts wherein all kinds of sin are comprehended under this term : and therefore it may be as well so here. I need only to refer you to the

6th of the Romans, where the apostle speaks of *the wages of sin being death*ⁿ, all sin of whatsoever kind; and so we are said to *dye to sin*, and to *rise in newness of life*^o. And that *sin shall not have dominion over us*^p. Where sin, in the singular number, means all kind of sin together.

Therefore *the sin of the world*, may be very well interpreted of all the sins that men are guilty of, as rendering them obnoxious to the curse of God's law; all the transgressions and violations of it. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to *take away sin* after this manner. *The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all*^q, says the prophet Isaiah. That is, all kind of iniquity of which we have been guilty. And the prophet Daniel foretels, that he should *finish transgression, make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity*^r. Sin therefore comprehends all sin. So that *the sin of the world* signifies all the transgressions that men commit in the world. Whatsoever iniquities are committed, our Lord Jesus as *the lamb of God* came to *take away by the sacrifice of himself*^s. *The sin of the world* is therefore the sins of men indefinitely.

III. What is it *to take away the sin of the world*? What is the sense of this in the place under our notice? The word that is

ⁿ Rom. 6. 23.

^o ver. 2, 10, 11.

^p ver. 14.

^q Isa. 53. 6.

^r Dan. 9. 24.

^s Heb. 9. 26.

used in the original ^s, is taken several ways in the New Testament: and there is a word in the Old Testament in the Hebrew, that seems to be of the same significancy and extent, and is used variously in like manner. Here I shall shew that it signifies and may import,

1. A substitution of one for another, so as to *bear* that which belongs to another.

2. The expiation of guilt, or making satisfaction to the divine justice.

3. The pardon of sin. And,

4. The mortification or subduing of sin. All these may well be comprehended in the text.

1. As for the substitution of one for another. It is said, as we intimated before, *the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all* ^t; transferred our guilt upon him. So the word is taken, *Mat. 11. 29.* ^u for taking up; a voluntary taking up, of Christ's yoke, *take my yoke upon you.* Take it up voluntarily. If we interpret this actively of our Lord Jesus Christ; why it was a voluntary taking upon himself to answer for our guilt, a taking upon him a debt that we had contracted, in order to satisfy divine justice: for in order to make satisfaction there must be a substitution; and therefore, our Lord suffered

^s ὁ ἀίρων.

^t Isa. 53, 6.

| ^u ἀρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου—

not only for our benefit, but in our place. And in several other places the word signifies a man's taking something as a burden upon himself. So our Lord Jesus Christ may be said to take up our sins, to take the burden of them upon himself; *he was made sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* ^v.

2: In like manner it may signify expiation and satisfaction. So 1 Pet. 2. 24. *who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.* Here is not only a substitution, his standing in our stead, and bearing our guilt upon him; but his making expiation, his making satisfaction, and bearing our sins upon the cross, and dying, shedding his precious blood to make reconciliation. His bearing, or taking our sins upon him, shews that he put himself in our place: his bearing the punishment that was due to our sins, shews that he made satisfaction for them, and hereby brought in an *everlasting righteousness* ^w.

3. It signifies pardon. This is comprehended or implied in the other: for if he makes satisfaction for our sins; then, as there was room for God to pardon without derogation from his justice, so our Lord hath power to forgive sins, it being a part of his

^v 2 Cor. 5. 21.

| ^w Dan. 9. 24.

kingly office, part of his exaltation. *Because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore hath God highly exalted him*^x. He shewed something of this royal power and authority while upon earth; in the case of the paralytick, Mark 2. 10, 11. *That you may know, says he, that the son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins; I say unto thee, arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And, thy sins are forgiven thee*; says he to the poor woman in Luke 7. 48. But our Lord Jesus is now exalted in a special manner to dispense this power, of forgiving of sins. He is *exalted as a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins*^y, to give remission of sins himself. So he takes away our sins, he removes them from us, he takes them upon himself, and bears them by way of substitution and satisfaction: and he takes them away from us by pardoning and forgiving them; for so the word frequently signifies; a taking away our sins, by blotting out transgressions; covering our iniquities, by granting us a remission of them.

4. It may signify the mortification of sin too. I might shew you that the word in the Hebrew which signifies *bearing of sin*, or *taking it away*, and imports pardon: so it likewise signifies subduing; as ^z Isa. 1.

^x Phil. 2. 8, 9.

^y Acts 5. 31.

| ^z ואסירה.

25. So the Greek word, 1 John 3. 5. *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins.* This is the same in the original ^a with that word in our text. And it will plainly appear, that it is here used to signify the subduing the power of sin, if you compare it with what goes before in the 4th verse and what follows. *Whosoever commiteth sin, transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him neither known him. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins.* Here the apostle presses it as an argument for sanctification, for living holily: for this was one end of Christ's being manifested; *to take away our sins*, i. e. the power of them. I think it is past reasonable contradiction, that the phrase in this place signifies the subduing of sin: and it is the same word with that in our text. And to the like purpose we read of our redemption by Christ: 1 Pet. 1. 18, &c. *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver, and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. We are redeemed not only from the guilt of sin, but from our vain conversation, by the offering of Christ*

^a ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀφῇ.

the lamb of God : who came *to take away the sin of the world*, in this respect ; to redeem us from the power of sin, as well as from the guilt of sin, to break and loose the bands wherewith we were bound ; not only that we might escape the penalty we have deserved, but might be delivered from the slavery to which we were subjected.

Thus have I endeavoured to clear up the sense of these words : which was my principal intention. So that it appears this was the great design of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ : he came to substitute himself for us, that he might be in a condition to make expiation for our guilt : he came actually to do this ; in order to give pardon or remission of sin, to take away the guilt of our sins from us : and he came to take away the power of sin, that that might be subdued. Thus *the lamb of God takes away the sin of the world*. And this confirms what had been said before concerning the sins of the world ; our Lord Jesus takes away the sins of the world, by making men holy, as well as taking away their guilt. Those that would understand *the world* in this place universally, would not presume to say, that our Lord took away the power of the sin of the world universally ; for that is an after work. It seems therefore reasonable that we should not limit the sense : but let the word be as extensive as in other places, and so understand it of men indefinitely. And indeed the sins
of

of all those shall be purged away, both the guilt and the filth done away, from all those that lay hold on our Lord Jesus Christ by faith. If they will interpret it after this manner, and determine the sense by that condition, it is the same that is said in other texts of scripture. But then this will so dispose the matter that it will be no more than what we say; if they interpret it, I say, under this condition of believing. For it is certain from the event, that it is not either the universality or generality of the world that do believe: they are but a few in comparison; and therefore the most extensive sense that can fairly be given, is to interpret *the world* as signifying men indefinitely, of whatsoever degree, of whatsoever nation, or quality; of whatsoever rank of sinners against the law of God. The lamb of God is proposed to them as the great sacrifice, substituted to make atonement, to offer pardon; and is able to subdue all their iniquity.

I might here insist more particularly upon the several parts of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in taking away sin. I might shew you, that in regard of the substitution, all things are well concerted there. For it is consistent with the justice of God, that one should be substituted in the place of another, upon certain conditions; if it be voluntary; if there is no injustice offered to him, that suffers the penalty due to another;

another ; if in other respects he is proper and fit for that purpose. It is true, it may be injustice if a man have not a right to dispose of himself, because others have a greater right to him. But our Lord had power and authority to dispose of himself, because he was more than a man, for he was *God manifest in the flesh*^b : therefore he could dispose of his humane nature as he pleased, and make himself an offering for sin. Another condition must be, that this person must honour the law of God, as much as if the persons guilty had suffered. And he did this more, because he was a person of infinite dignity ; the honour therefore which he paid to the law of God, bears a proportion to the grandeur of his person. Another considerable condition seems to be this, to render a substitution just and fit ; if hereby sin might be discouraged as much or more, and holiness as much or more encouraged, by the sufferings of the substitution, as if the guilty person had suffered. Now sin is more discouraged, and holiness more encouraged by Christ's undertaking for us, than if we had suffered for our own sins. For if we had suffered for our own sins, there would not have been any such thing as holiness in the world, there would not have been any motive to engage us to be holy ; for it is the love of God, his

^b 1 Tim. 3. 16.

grace, that melts us effectually. We could not have been reformed without grace, nor could we have grace without Christ had merited it by his sufferings: therefore his sufferings lay a foundation for the establishment of holiness, and discourage all manner of sin. For besides the ordinary motives that are against it, there are powerful ones drawn from the sufferings of Christ, which most strongly fortify the soul against the power of temptations.

I might discourse to you in like manner concerning satisfaction, and shew you of how great extent the sacrifice of our Lord was, in regard of its eminent dignity, both from the dignity of his person, and the extraordinary greatness of his sufferings, and from the excellent temper and frame of his mind, when under them. I might prove from the consequences likewise, of our Saviour's death, that the satisfaction was plenary, God having declared himself well pleased, not only in the life of Christ, and by his raising him from the dead, whereby he declared his sacrifice was available: but also in that he hath received him up to the throne of glory, *there ever to live to make intercession for us*^c. As he *ascended up on high, so he gave gifts to men*^d. By the extraordinary effusion of the spirit in consequence of his exaltation, we have a wonderful proof of

^c Heb. 7. 25.| ^d Eph. 4. 8.

the availableness of his satisfaction.

I might also enlarge upon the pardon which our Lord not only procures, but gives. He procured it as a priest; in offering satisfaction, he merited the remission of sins. But besides this, he gives it as a prince. And I might shew you that this pardon contains in it not only an exemption from punishment, but likewise a restoring us to God's favour; and so high favour is that which our Lord hath merited, as to comprehend in it all the privileges both of the state of grace, and that of glory.

I might moreover shew you, that it is no less a part of our Lord's undertaking, to take away sin from us, in sanctifying our natures, than to take away our punishment by substituting himself in our stead: so that this indeed shews the perfection of his undertaking, the perfection of his work; for this will advance us to the state of glory, where there will be perfect sanctity. He perfectly justifies now by his righteousness; but he perfectly sanctifies by his grace. But the time obliges me to draw to a conclusion; therefore I shall make but a reflection or two upon what I have said. And,

1. If our Lord Jesus came to offer himself to dye as *a lamb*, a sacrifice *without blemish, and without spot**, that he might

* 1 Pet. 1. 19.

take away the sin of the world : as this intimates to us the wonderful efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and its availableness to the end and purpose proposed ; so it shews the riches of his grace, and love to us, as well as the love of the father. What was this world in comparison of him ? worse than nothing ; *less than nothing and vanity* ^f. There was nothing to move him to shew mercy ; but much to provoke him to execute his wrath and judgment upon men. *All men had sinned, and come short of the glory of God : there was none that did good, no not one* ^g. What infinite love must that be, that can find arguments in itself, when none were to be found from the world, in favour of the objects on whom this love was set, and for whom this provision was made ? it was no less than infinite love that should cause the father to send the son, and engage the son to put himself in our stead, and offer himself a sacrifice for us, when there was nothing taking and endearing, but all hateful and provoking on our side. As this shews the wonderful love of God, so the efficacy of this sacrifice. Our Lord came to offer up himself, to take away the sin of the world : whatsoever sin Jew or Gentile, bond or free had been guilty of ; whatsoever violation of God's law, whatsoever aggravations attended these iniquities, *the blood of Jesus*

^f Isa. 40. 17.| ^g Rom. 3. 12, 23.

*Christ his son, cleanses us from all sin. Tho innumerable evils have compassed us about, tho our iniquities have taken hold upon us, so that we are not able to look up, tho they are more than the hairs of our head; ^h tho our sins be as scarlet and crimson ⁱ; there is the same efficacy in the blood of our Redeemer; the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin ^k. There is but one sin that cannot be forgiven; and that is not so properly a sin against the law of God, strictly speaking, as against the manifestation of his grace and spirit: and the reason why those cannot be saved who are guilty of that sin, is not because there is not an infinite value in the blood of Christ to save, but because it is inconsistent with the divine perfections in the order of justice to save men without repentance: and it is impossible from the nature of the sin, that they should be brought to repentance who are guilty of it, because these harden themselves against the clearest light, and the greatest methods of grace and mercy. What an encouragment then is here given to sinners? and have not we who are ministers of the word of salvation, reason to complain of men that *they will not believe our report* ^l, when it is so well founded, and so well furnished with motives, in regard to the great love of God to sinners, and the interest*

^h Psal. 40. 12.ⁱ Isa. 1. 18.^k 1 John 1. 7.^l Isa. 53. 1.

that

that every man hath to seek for the salvation of his soul? Have not your consciences been troubled sometimes under the sense of sin? Have you not sometimes considered what an odious thing it is? Have you never been affected with a sense of the corruption of your own nature, and the sins of your lives? Have you never looked into your danger? Have you never considered what *a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God?* Have you not heard of *the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death^m, of the worm that dies not, and of the fire that can never be quenchedⁿ?* Do you not know that *God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the secrets of all hearts^o?* do not you know that those who are not interested in Christ, and his sufferings, cannot escape this? do not you know you can never make reparation to the divine majesty for your transgressions, by all that you can do or suffer? do not you know that *there is no name under heaven whereby men can be saved, but the name of Jesus^p?* why then have you not secured this great and important point? *Why will you not come unto Christ that you may have life?* Our Saviour complains of the Jews in his day, John 5. 40. *Ye will not come to me that you might have life.* We, as John the baptist, say unto you,

^m Mark 9. 44.ⁿ Rev. 20. 14.^o Acts 17. 31. Rom. 2. 16.^p Acts 4. 12.

behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; who believes this; or shews they do believe it by imbracing Jesus Christ crucified? who is willing to be washed in his blood, to be clothed with his righteousness, to be conformed to his image, to submit to his government, and put themselves under his conduct for salvation? You are in the utmost danger if you apply not yourselves to this sacrifice. And our Lord will cast out none that come unto him. *Whosoever comes to me* (says Christ) *I will in no wise cast out*^a; whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free. Here is an indefinite representation of our Lord Jesus, as the sacrifice for the sins of men: therefore what should hinder you from seeking peace and reconciliation with God, in the new and living way that he hath consecrated?

II. This should engage us all if we have partaken of Christ Jesus, and have been washed in his blood, to consider what was the end of his sufferings, *to take away the sin of the world*, the power as well as the guilt of sin. Let us apply ourselves to the lamb of God for both; for his grace is sufficient for us. *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the father*^b. And *his blood cleanses us from all sin*^c. Let us apply

^a John 6. 37.

^b 1 John 2. 1.

^c 1 John 1. 7.

ourselves

ourselves to *this fountain, that is opened for sin and for uncleanness*^s. *This is he that came by water and by blood*^t; to sanctify and cleanse us that way, as well as to make an attonement for our sins by his blood. The water and blood that issued from his side, signified that he came both to justify, and to sanctify. Therefore, as in the ministry of the gospel we are directed to Jesus Christ, as to *the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world*; and as he says, *when I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me*^v; so let us look up to him, that we may have life, and that our faces may not be ashamed at the great day of his appearance.

^s Zech. 13. 1.^t 1 John 5. 6.^v John 12. 32.



S E R M O N XII.

Death to good men a desirable release.

Occasion'd by the death of Mr.
— H I L L.

Preach'd at

PINNERS-HALL, Aug. 17. 1706.

J O B 3. 17.

*There the wicked cease from troubling ; and
there the weary be at rest.*



THE book of *Job* seems to have been written, to justify the providence of God, in sometimes permitting the best of men to be exercised with the greatest afflictions : a consideration which has stumbled many wise and good men. The psalmist
2 declares,

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declares, that he was ready to think, *he had washed his hands in innocency, and cleansed his heart in vain; when he saw the prosperous condition of the wicked, and himself was chastened every morning*^s. But this matter is well cleared up in this book, to every one that will consider the patience of Job, and the end of the Lord^t; as the apostle James remarks. It will appear indeed, that this person, who was famed for piety above any one in the earth, at least above any one in that part of the world; so that God himself seems to boast of him, and challenge Satan concerning him, *hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil*^v? it will appear I say, that this person, holy and excellent as he was, was yet afflicted after an uncommon manner. But then it will also appear, upon the issue of the providence that attended him, that there was enough in the manner of his behaviour, and in the favourable return of good things to him at last, to convince his friends that it was very possible, for a man to be very holy, and yet be exposed to great misery and trouble for a while; and to convince him that God was *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works* towards him^u; who chastened him after this ter-

^s Psal. 73. 13, 14.

^t James 4. 11.

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^v Job 1. 8.

^u Psal. 145. 17.

rible manner, to exercise his faith and patience, to make him more humble, and to let him see the divine sovereignty over him, and the entire dependence in which his mind ought to be on the providence of God, who turned all his sorrow into joy, and his adverse state into a condition of prosperity.

Almost the whole of this book is written in a poetical stile. Indeed the beginning of it, which is an historical relation of the prosperity of Job, and of the sufferings that befel him; and the end of it, which shews the return of his prosperity afterwards, is written in prose. But the speeches that are made by Job, and by his friends, and represented as made by God himself, at the close of the book, are all in poetry. In the first chapter of this book, an account is given of Job's great piety, and of his prosperous condition; and then an account of the dreadful calamities that befel him; his children all destroy'd by the fall of a house, his cattel taken from him, and his servants slain by the *Sabeans* and *Chaldeans*, or destroy'd by fire from heaven. In the second chapter, we have an account that he was himself tormented with a loathsome, and painful disease, his body being smitten all over with boils; and that his wife, who should have been his comforter, tempted him under his great afflictions, *to curse God and die* ^w,

^w Job 2. 9.

when she saw such extraordinary calamities befall him. Under all which misery, Job behaved himself well, as is testified of him in the 10th verse. *He said unto her, thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh; what, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? in all this Job sinned not with his lips.* The latter end of the chapter informs us, that Job's friends came to visit him on this melancholy occasion: and that when they beheld so doleful a spectacle, *they lift up their voices and wept, and each one rent his mantle, as you see in the 12th verse, and sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven; so they sat down with him upon the ground, seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great*^{*}. This long and mournful silence was a very solemn manner of condolance indeed. At length Job begins to vent himself, and in the most moving terms to express his sorrow; in the beginning of this chapter, from whence I have taken my text. *After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake and said, let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, there is a man-child conceived. Let that day be darkness, let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it, &c.* Thus

^{*} ver. 13.

he delivers himself to the same purpose in divers following verses.

Here indeed occurs a difficulty : and many learned men have been at a loss, what to think concerning this passage, that Job should curse the day of his birth. As likewise the same difficulty has occur'd concerning the prophet Jeremiah, in chap. 20. ver. 14. *Curfed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me, be blessed. Curfed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, a man-child is born unto thee, making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not, &c.*

Some have thought that these expressions might be justified; and others, that they are worthy of blame. 'Tis more difficult indeed to justify what is said by the prophet Jeremiah, than what is said by Job. They both cursed the day of their birth: but Jeremiah cursed the man that brought the tidings that himself was born, and would have such a one overthrown and made like Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems indeed, to be an extraordinary transport of passion, that render'd him guilty of a great sin: for we are commanded not to curse but to bless; *bless and curse not* y. And 'tis a very unreasonable thing, for any person to wish or pray for any misery and calamity on others, especially

on those that are innocent, and deserve no such imprecation; as we must easily imagine to be the case of the person that brought news to *Jeremiah's* father, of the time of his birth. Some indeed endeavour to save this matter, by saying, that after he had represented the occasion he had of thanksgiving, for God's delivering him out of the dungeon, he signified what he was tempted to do, while his calamities were upon him. But this doth not appear from the context: and the words most plainly give us a direct account, that he cursed the man that brought tidings of his birth to his father. It ought, I think, therefore to be understood as *Jeremiah's* great fault, and to be reckon'd among those sins of good men, which are recorded in scripture as warnings to us, that we might avoid being guilty of the same.

As for *Job*, who only curses the day of his birth, I think that may be represented very fairly not to be criminal. Cursing, indeed, is spoken of variously in the holy scripture. Sometimes it signifies the infliction of a punishment: so God is said to curse men, when he inflicts punishments upon them, because of their sins. *Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree*², as saith the law. Sometimes it signifies the denunciation of a sentence in order to punishment: so God in his law pronounces curses upon those

² Gal. 3. 13.

that should be guilty of various sins, declaring that such curses were justly to be inflicted on them, and should overtake them. Sometimes it is a prophetic prediction : and thus the prophets pray after such a manner, for judgments to befall the wicked. But this does not justify others, in praying for judgments to befall any particular persons, unless they could prove they had the spirit of prophecy, and so could predict the ruin of persons as the prophets did. 'Tis true, in general, we may pray for the accomplishment of the holy scripture, and for the destruction of the enemies of God, and for the welfare of communities that are engaged in a just war, and for the defeat of other communities, whose cause is unjust, and who are bringing miseries upon mankind. But then cursing sometimes may signify, as 'tis apply'd to *things*, and not to *persons*, something different from those ideas we have been expressing : for sometimes *things* are cursed ; and so the *ground* is said to be *cursed for the sake of man*^a. *Things* that are incapable of understanding, or of moral actions, cannot be so properly cursed ; but whatever curse there was upon the ground, this was upon the account of man's sin, and to render his condition more troublesome and uneasy. The degeneracy of the creation, there being a degeneracy, in all probability,

^a Gen. 3. 17.

in all creatures, that were subordinate to man, is an expression of God's wrath and curse upon man himself. And when a time is said to be curs'd, as Job curses the time of his birth, it cannot be supposed that he strictly wish'd that darkness should be upon that time, and that it should not have those advantages that other days had ; that he really desired to have the very day itself on which he was born thus mark'd with the displeasure of heaven, which was impossible, it being past and gone. Or indeed that he by this expression strictly desired, the same day in its annual revolution to be thus treated. No ; it should rather I think be taken, only as an elegant, poetical expression, and as much as to say, " If such a thing could be, " I could wish that day were clouded with " darkness, and that there might be some " extraordinary mark placed upon it, by " the providence of God, because it produced " a man that is become so miserable as I am " at present." And thus seeing it imports no evil desire to any person, but by a prosopœia, is a figurative representation of his great sorrow ; we ought to take it, I think, in this poetical view and not strictly in the letter.

Now while he is declaring this his great sorrow after this manner, and complaining that ever he was born alive into the world, he proceeds to lament that he did not die, however, as soon as he was born ; he says,
in

in ver. 11, 12, 13. *why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost, when I came out of the belly? why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? for now should I have lien still, and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest.* As much as to say, “why have I lived to these years, to undergo such a variety of miseries? why was I not rather cut off as soon as I enter’d into the world? then I should have never seen such a dismal day as this. An early death had prevented these uncommon calamities; and I should now have been in a state of quiet and repose.” And then as envying those that were dead, (still speaking after this poetical manner) he represents to himself in what a condition they were, and how much more happy than himself, ver. 14, 15. *with kings and counsellours of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves. They prepared tombs for themselves before they dy’d; with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver.* Where he seems to refer to the custom of some princes, who when they were interr’d had great treasures buried with them: and in the eastern parts of the world this custom is used to this day. He goes on farther, in the words of our text and the two following verses, to represent the same state of the dead: *There the wicked (that is in the grave) cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest, &c.* There lie, says

says he, " the great men of the world ; and
" the poor and contemptible are there ;
" the prince, and counsellour, and the
" prisoners and captives : there the servant
" is free from his master ; the small and
" great are there, in the like state of re-
" pose." *Wherefore is light given to him that
is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul^b ?*
" Why is my life continued, when I have
" so much trouble that renders death more
" eligible to me ?" *who long for death but it
cometh not, and dig for it more than for hid
treasures^c ; &c.* In this manner he expresses
his passionate desire to die.

Thus you see these words are a part of
Job's description of the quiet and repose
that there is in the state of the dead. And
he uses these kind of expressions to signify,
how much himself desired to die, who had
endured so much sorrow and misery. *There
the wicked cease from troubling, and there the
weary be at rest.* As he mourns that ever he
was born, and wishes he had died as soon as
he came into the world ; so he complains
that he still lived under those great burthens
and afflictions that at present attended him.

There : that is, in the grave : for tho
the grave is not express'd, he had been
speaking of the state of the dead, and there-
fore you may be sure his thoughts were fix'd
upon that. *There* ; that is, in that state

^b ver. 20.| ^c ver. 21.

and condition, *the wicked cease from troubling*. The word that is here render'd *wicked*^d, some render, *those who are in continual motion and agitation*; the men that are disturbed, they cease from trouble. But however, seeing the word is generally translated *wicked* in the holy scripture, it seems most agreeable to take it so here: *the wicked cease from troubling, the voice of the oppressor is no more heard*^e. Some indeed think that the sense of *Job* is, *there the wicked cease from being troubled* themselves, with the remorse of conscience, or from being agitated by their violent passions and sins; and so, that *Job* represents that 'tis better, even for the wicked themselves, to be in the state of the dead, than alive, where they are agitated with violent passions, and where they commit sins, which fill them with remorse and trouble of mind. But this sense seems to be too much strained: for tho' 'tis true, that the wicked cease from sinning in their bodies, when their bodies are in the grave; it does not follow, that their souls cease from sinning, when they are in a state of separation from their bodies. But as they must then be in a condition of despair and misery, in a state where there is no repentance, to be sure they must needs persist in a state of sin; and therefore 'tis better much, for them to be alive, than to be in the state

^d רשעים.

^e ver. 18.

of the dead: for as they are in a state of sin there, so to be sure they are in a state of misery and despair; and while they are so, their aversion to God is still greater. And then as for remorse and trouble of conscience; as the wicked have it here, the torment of their minds must certainly be much more in the other world, the agitation of their spirits must be much more terrible, than while they only had some apprehension of these things, and while these apprehensions were not strong enough to retain them from committing sin, for the commission of which these miseries were threatned.

Some interpret these words after this manner: *there the wicked*, that is, such as were once wicked finners, but have true repentance, there they *cease from trouble*, from agitation or disturbance of mind, cease from their evil passions, or from remorse of conscience, and are in a state of ease and repose. But there seems no colour at all for this sense in the text: for here the wicked are spoken of absolutely, without the least intimation of their repentance; tho indeed there is the authority of the Chaldee paraphrase for this interpretation.

But I think the most genuine interpretation is with reference to the righteous. *There the wicked cease from troubling*: that is, there no wicked man can trouble the righteous, none can trouble the pious man there: and *those that are weary with affliction*

affliction and persecution, *are at rest*. And this concurs very well with what follows; *there the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor*^f. This, therefore, as being most agreeable with the context, I chuse as the proper sense of the text. And this is suitable to the character of Job, and the circumstances of his sufferings too. For, can it be imagined, while righteous Job is wishing to be dead, it should come into his mind that in that state the wicked were at ease? No: he well knew it was the beginning of their sorrows: therefore reason, as well as the context and the character of Job, shews that the words must be thus interpreted. To this we may add the present circumstances of the good man's sufferings. He had been very injuriously dealt with: troops of robbers came upon him, and took away his cattel: he might therefore well say, *there the weary cease from troubling*. His sleep was taken from him by the anguish of his mind, and by the pains of his dis-temper'd body: he might therefore well cry out, *there the weary are at rest*. It is a state of repose for the body; and 'tis a state of rest and joy and satisfaction for the soul. But he seems to speak chiefly of the body here. Having given you this explication of the text, it will furnish us with a fair occasion,

^f ver. 18.

I. To treat of the state of good men in this world; and shew, that they are sometimes exposed to great affliction, to persecution, to much trouble and sorrow.

II. To shew, that death will release them from all those troubles and miseries which do attend them in this world. And,

III. To observe that a reflection on this, has made the prospect of death not only tolerable to good men, but desireable.

I will not undertake to say that Job's passionate desire of death was not too earnest: but, however, good men may desire death on some occasions, and with some restriction, as we shall have occasion to shew; and as the reason of the thing may justify it on some accounts, so there are instances in the scripture of this kind. On these three things, I say, the words that have been read to you, lead us to discourse.

I. We are to take notice, that good men in this world, are sometimes exposed to great trials and afflictions, great sorrows and calamities. It was on this account, that Job desired to pass out of this world into another; that he might be free from those great troubles with which he was exercised. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous;* and nothing is more frequent in scripture,

⁊ Psal. 34. 19.

than the complaints of such good men on this account. Those who have been very remarkable for piety, have been as remarkable for sufferings. I might instance in many of the faithful servants of God, under the Old Testament as well as under the new. I might instance in Jacob, in Moses, in David, in the prophet Jeremiah, in the apostle Paul, and many of the primitive christians and martyrs; who were exposed to all manner of afflictions and troubles in this world, were variously exercised with one sorrow after another. And here is a very remarkable instance in the case of Job, who cries out most bitterly of the greatness of his trouble and affliction. There is no language can express, how great the calamity of Job may well be thought to have been, under all those miseries that we are told befel him. There are indeed some of the righteous; nay, there are many of them, that pass their days free from abundance of troubles and calamities, which have befallen others. But however, 'tis no uncommon thing for the righteous to be exposed to great afflictions in this world. There are many sorrows and troubles of the world, that befall the righteous in common with other men; and then there are others peculiar to them and to their own circumstances: and further, there are some persons, singled out from among the rest, to be made remarkable instances of affliction;

affliction ; that the grace of God may be the more eminently manifested in their support ; and that the holiness, and purity, the humility, and patience, and resignation of their minds, might be more clearly discerned, to render them examples for the imitation of others.

But besides, I say, that there are some persons distinguished by extraordinary afflictions ; 'tis common for men to have trouble and sorrow in this life, tho some have much more than others ; and good men in particular, they have sorrows, such as are common to others. Their bodies are exposed to diseases as well as those of other men. They are oblig'd to *get their bread in the sweat of their brow*^h, with great toil and uneasiness as well as the rest of mankind. They are exposed to the same want and pain, the same frailty and mortality ; their minds are capable of being impress'd with trouble and sorrow after the same manner, generally speaking, as other men. They meet with crosses in the world, with poverty and distress, with the unkindness and ingratitude of friends and children. Their dear relations and friends are taken away from them after the same common manner. They have trouble and anguish on all those accounts, wherein the minds of men may be naturally touched and

^h Gen. 3. 19.

impres'd with sorrow ; and so, as the wise man observes, *there is no difference between the righteous and the wicked, generally speaking ; what happens to the one, happens to the other*ⁱ ; tho, indeed, the righteous are capable of bearing these sorrows after another manner than the wicked. But God's love and hatred are not known by these things under the sun : his providence is pleased to afflict us after the manner of the rest of mankind, in those general and common instances ; and therefore we should not murmur or repine at God's providence, but remember that there is *no strange affliction happens to us, when these things befall us, but such as is common to men*^k.

But then the godly have many times peculiar afflictions and distresses, and so their sorrow is greater than that of others. Good men are considerate, they make use of their reason, and exercise themselves in thought and reflection ; for 'tis impossible to be religious without consideration, and making reflection on our own actions and circumstances, and those of others. The wicked, they are amused with abundance of vain appearances of things ; they don't give themselves time to think on their ways, as the righteous do : *I thought on my ways, says the psalmist ; and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*^l. The fancies of wicked men

ⁱ Ecclef. 9. 1, 2, 3.

^k 1 Cor. 10. 13.

^l Psal. 119. 59.

are taken with the vain shew of temporal things; and they are pleased and flattered with these, and don't care to give themselves time to consider the reason of things, and to aim at that satisfaction and joy which infinitely surpasses all sensual delight: and therefore the reason why they sometimes seem not to have the trouble that other persons have, is, because they don't make use of their understandings: these persons are known by their gay and frolick humour. If they were capable of making a due reflection upon things, they would, by their *increasing knowledge, increase their sorrow*^m.

When pious men consider the degeneracy of the world, the universal corruption of *mankind*; how *all flesh have corrupted their way*ⁿ, and *the whole world lieth in the wicked one*^o; how foolish and vain men are, labouring like mad men *for that which doth not profit*^p, nay labouring to destroy themselves, pursuing eagerly those pleasures that will be the bane of their souls: when they consider what sin deserves at the hand of God, and what misery is coming upon their impenitent fellow creatures: this gives them abundance of trouble and sorrow. Their sympathy with those that are in affliction, their charity and tenderness for others in distress, make them great sharers

^m Eccles. 1. 18.ⁿ Gen. 6. 12.| ^o 1 John 5. 19. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ
^p Isa. 55. 2.

in it themselves. While the ungodly are amused with the pleasures and delights of sense, their regard to the honour of God when they hear his sacred name profan'd, touches them with abundance of affliction and pain. They weep over the sins and follies, and deplore the miseries that attend mankind, as our Saviour did over Jerusalem ⁹. Thus they increase their sorrow, by their love to God and charity to men, by their viewing of things after a more advantageous manner than other men; by these things their sorrow is increased and multiplied. And they have not only peculiar occasion of trouble on this account; but when they look into the state of their own souls, they have a great deal of sorrow and affliction. Tho they have some cause of joy to find their souls in another condition than those of other men, or than they themselves formerly were; yet they can't chuse but cry out, *O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from this body of death* ^r!

When they consider that *with them, even with them are iniquities against the Lord their God* ^r; when they consider the rule of their duty, and the motives that religion affords for their encouragement in the discharge of it, and particularly the examples

⁹ Luke 19. 41.

^r Rom. 7. 24.

| ^r 2 Chron. 28. 10:

that are set them by *so great a cloud of witnesses* as the saints in all ages have been, and the perfect pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ himself; this must needs give good men very sorrowful reflections, that they fall so much short of many who have gone before them; that there should be any thing in them opposite to the divine will, that they should be ungrateful to that God to whom they owe all the blessings they enjoy, or can possibly expect; that ever they should cast the least contempt upon the divine word; that they should not reverence the law of God as they ought, which is so excellent in itself, and calculated for their own truest interest; or that they should in any respect neglect so great a salvation, as that which is freely offer'd to them in the gospel.

And they have likewise troubles from without, from the temptations of Satan, who is a subtle adversary. He rages with fury against those that are in any tolerable measure conformable to the will of God. He is *the accuser of the brethren*^s; his malice and rage are bent against them. You know how greatly the apostle Paul was afflicted, when *a messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him*^t. Wicked men likewise who are the instruments of the devil, they oftentimes persecute the righteous. 'Tis no strange

^s Rev. 12. 10.| ^t 2 Cor. 12. 7.

thing in the world for good men to be persecuted by others; there are a multitude of instances of this kind in the holy scripture: and since the scripture has been written, succeeding generations declare the great persecution the church of God has met with from the hands of wicked men. The apostle Paul elegantly describes his own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11. What troubles from friends and enemies, what perils by sea and by land, what a scene of sorrows does he represent to us, besides the care of all the churches, the sympathy he had with others that were in sorrow and affliction? A multitude of examples there are of this kind; tho indeed the apostle was an instance of the highest rank. There will be persecution while there are wicked men in the world: and if they are restrained from exerting their anger and fury, after the most violent manner; however by their slanders, by their bitter scoffs, and their cruel mockings, by such means and ways as they are capable of, they will be shewing their spite against the church of God, and against those that are truly religious. This often happens in the world; and in the case of Job particularly, you find what I have said, was in a remarkable manner verified. 'Tis true he was once in a prosperous condition: but when poverty and contempt came upon him, and when he was despised by those that were vastly his inferiors, when he was laught at and scorned

scorned by the meanest of the people ; you will acknowledge that his affliction was very great. Not only to have his substance taken from him in an instant, but to have his whole family snatched away, and his children taken under such circumstances as might make the trouble the greater ; for he was afraid they would sin against God at those meetings they had to eat and drink together : to have oppressors destroy his servants with the sword, and take away his cattle from him : to have the wicked trouble him after this manner, besides, the reflections that were made in his own mind, as well as in the speeches of his friends concerning the providence of God, which put him to a non-plus, and drew many a dolorous sigh from his breast, and many a sad lamentation from his lips : to have so great an affliction, as to be delivered, as it were, into the hands of Satan ; to have weary days and restless nights ; and at the same time that those who should comfort his soul, should aggravate his misery, by charging him with hypocrisy ; and that the wife of his bosom should tempt him after so terrible a manner in the midst of his sufferings, instead of exhorting him to patience and tranquility : that he should be thus tormented in his body and in his mind : all these things serve to verify what has been said, that pious men are sometimes exposed to great afflictions in this world. I do not say they are
always

always so exposed, but sometimes they are exposed to very great and remarkable afflictions ; as was the case of Job.

Before I proceed to the next head, it seems a little necessary, that I should vindicate the providence of God, and take off the objection that might be made by profane persons, who may be ready to say, if God approved of righteous men, he would never expose them so to afflictions in this life ; and take off likewise what may be objected by good men, who might lay claim to the promises of this life, as well as of that to come.

As for the former sort, those who profanely declare that 'tis not worth their while to be righteous, and count it a weariness to serve God, because *they that work wickedness are set up* ^v, and the righteous are *chastened every morning* ^w; 'tis enough to answer them, if they were told that these are but *light afflictions* ^w, and *but for a moment*, and *not to be compared with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* ^x, which is reserved for them : that God does it to prepare them for heaven and glory. This is enough to answer what the profane can say : for certainly the enjoyment of the presence of God, in a state of everlasting felicity, will make full amends for all the temporal afflictions they can endure.

^v Mal. 3. 15.
^w Psal. 3. 14.

^w 2 Cor. 4. 17.
^x Rom. 8. 18.

To answer the other, how is this consistent with the promises that are made to the righteous, of the good things of this life, as well as of that to come? I answer,

1. That we must interpret those promises that relate to the things of this life, as we do proverbs; that generally speaking, these things are true. And so, generally speaking, good men have the blessings of this life; various blessings, which God gives in return of their prayers, and as a reward of their piety and charity in this life: while there are often remarkable punishments that attend the workers of iniquity. It may be discern'd, that while multitudes are reduced to extreme poverty, and so rendred very miserable, the psalmist says, *I never saw the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*^y. Not but that some of these may be poor: but he seems to mean there, by *the righteous*, the charitable man; or however it may be interpreted as a proverbial speech; *I never saw the righteous*, that is, in my observation it has not happened that righteous men are exposed to extreme indigence and want, or that their children are remarkably poor. A few instances will not hinder a proverb from taking place; and so the psalmist may be interpreted as speaking proverbially. But,

2. We are moreover to observe, that as it

^y Psal. 37. 25.

does not ordinarily happen, that the righteous are exposed to greater afflictions than other men; so we must not so aggravate the miseries of the righteous, as to think they are greater than those of the wicked, but weigh them in an equal ballance: and we shall find it much more happy for the righteous in this world, generally speaking, than for the wicked. As for the wicked: constant observation discovers that they are compassed with many troubles and sorrows in this life; and as they are *treacherous dealers* themselves, so they are often *dealt with* by others. They have besides this, the agitation of their own minds, while they are harrafs'd with their cries: they are *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt* ². Whereas the righteous, if they are exposed to disappointments in this world, they know how to calm their passions, that these troubles don't disconcert them after such a manner. Moreover when the wicked enjoy what they seek, they find themselves yet disappointed, and there is not in the enjoyment what they expected: besides this, they waste their estates, weaken their constitutions, and bring pains and diseases upon themselves by their intemperance; and thus God's judgments often overtake them for their sins in this world. And therefore as to the common afflictions of

² Isa. 57. 20.

life; the wicked are much more troubled than the righteous: tho they are exposed to afflictions, yet their manner of living, renders them more secure than the ungodly. Peace of conscience, and joy of their innocence, give them pleasure and satisfaction, even when they recieve but little from the hand of God. The righteous thank God, as Job did under his afflictions, and bleſs his name; and tho ſometimes their minds are diſcompoſed, yet they recover themſelves, and can ſay, *return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee* ^a. When a righteous man is ſtripp'd of the things of this world, ſuppoſe that his calamity be as great as that of Job was, yet he has the proſpect of a bleſſed reſurrection and a future ſtate of happineſs: and this makes his preſent *afflictions* ſeem *light*, as they are *but for a moment*, and becauſe *they work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* ^b. But it is impoſſible for me in a ſhort diſcourſe to enumerate to you, the various things that alleviate the troubles of the righteous, and aggravate thoſe of the wicked: nor indeed is it needful; ſince generally ſpeaking, 'tis plain, that *godlineſs has the promiſe of this life* ^c. Generally ſpeaking, I ſay, the thing will hold good, that the righteous are in this life bleſt of God, and enjoy many

^a Pſal. 116. 7.^b 2 Cor. 4. 17.^c 1 Tim. 4. 8.

promises that render their condition abundantly more eligible than that of the wicked. However this must be granted, as we have observed already ; that sometimes God has made righteous men very remarkable for affliction, that they might be extraordinary examples of holiness ; and that such instances might support others ; and that he might engage such persons the more to eye the future recompence. And here is an eminent instance in Job ; tho afflicted in so extraordinary a manner in this world, God was pleased to turn back his captivity, to multiply to him temporal blessings, to give him the same number of children, to double the number of his cattel, and of all his substance, to give him twice as much as he had before, and to furnish his soul with an extraordinary degree of grace : thus his prosperous condition in the end of his life, will serve, in a particular manner, to justify the providence of God towards him. But I proceed,

II. To shew that death terminates the troubles and afflictions of the righteous. It is not so with the wicked, for they are troubled in the future state, in another world ; when their bodies rest in their graves, their souls are exposed to the divine judgment. *The wicked rich man died, and was carried into hell ; and the righteous beggar died also, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom :*

besom^d : which shews when men dye, their souls are differently disposed of ; the souls of the righteous are translated to a state of happiness, and the souls of the wicked to a state of misery. I need not now take occasion to prove to you the immortality of the soul, which is so frequently insisted on in the holy scripture. When the apostle *desires to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord*^e ; that one text is a plain proof of it.

But good men's sorrows are terminated when they come to die: they have no affliction but in this life ; death puts a period to all their calamities. When the soul is separated from the body, there is an end of every painful sensation that necessarily attended its union with it ; there is no weariness, no sorrow or trouble, upon the account of any thing that befalls the body.

And then, as for internal sorrows ; the state of rest which the soul enjoys in the presence of God, renders it free from every thing of that kind. *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*^f. How can it indeed be consistent with that happy state, that the soul should be in any kind of distress?

^d Luke 16. 22, 23.

^e 2 Cor. 5. 8.

^f Rev. 21. 4.

The enjoyment of the love and favour of God, and such a view of the divine perfections, as good men enjoy in that state, must needs free their spirits from all trouble and anguish, and render them truly and substantially happy: tho 'tis true, the consummation of this happiness shall be when body and soul are reunited.

'Tis not so with the wicked. When they die, however their bodies are at rest, their souls are exposed to great misery and torment; and therefore death is so much abhorred by them, and they chuse rather to live under great pain and misery, than to *pass through the valley of the shadow of death*^z; because they have reason to fear the dreadful punishment that awaits them.

But I proceed,

III. To observe that death is eligible to the righteous sometimes, and desired by them. When they are oppressed with great sorrows and afflictions, they long to be at rest: and accordingly we find Job earnestly desired it; as in this chapter, so likewise in the 10th chapter of this book. *My soul is weary of my life, I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul*^h. So likewise in chap. 16. *But now he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company*ⁱ. Which may be

^z Psal. 23. 4.

^h ver. 1.

ⁱ ver. 7.

interpreted

interpreted also of his being weary of his life. And chap. 6. ver. 8. where he more largely and strongly expresses his desire to die: *O that I might have my request! and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand and cut me off, &c.* And chap. 7. ver. 1. *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also as the days of an hireling? &c.* The prophet Elijah, tho he had it revealed to him from heaven that he should be translated, yet when he is persecuted and oppressed, he prays that he might die: *Lord, says he, now take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers^k; "therefore why should I pass into heaven after an extraordinary manner."* Job indeed passionately wishes for this; and perhaps with too earnest a desire, on the account of his great afflictions. But the apostle Paul desired *to be dissolved, and to be with Christ^l*, not so much because of the great troubles he underwent here, as the great felicity he expected when his soul should be separate from his body. But however, this ought to be cautiously considered. 'Tis a thing often desired by persons, who if they were in the view of death, would most passionately desire to live. Some under trouble will wish they were dead, without considering the

^k 1 Kings 19. 4.^l Phil. 1. 23. 2 Cor. 5.

consequence of such a change. Some of the Stoick philosophers were desirous to live under the greatest pain and torment ; and this seems to have been from the apprehension they had, that there might be some extraordinary change, disadvantageous to them, when they pass'd out of this world. But to desire death rationally, it must be considered that it should be always with submission to the divine will : as our Saviour when he would desire that *the cup* of his sufferings *might pass from him* ; not, says he, *my will, but thine be done* ^m. And the apostle Paul supposes this was lawful, when he hardly knew which to choose, when he was *in a state betwixt two* ⁿ : but still this supposes that 'twas lawful to desire the one or the other, only with a submission to the divine will.

Again, as when we do it with submission to God's will, 'tis one good character of the lawfulness of it ; so likewise when 'tis out of a good end and design ; and not as when people commonly wish it, that they may be rid of a present trouble only. The wicked don't desire to be out of this world, because they would be free from the sin and corruption of the world ; but that they might have present ease, immediate deliverance from some present calamity. Whereas a pious man, when he has a regard to a future state, and desires to pass out of this

^m Mat. 26. 39.

| ⁿ Phil. 1, 23.

world into it, 'tis that he may be free from all pollution; as well as sorrow. And as a good man ought to be contented to live, that he may be capable of rendering service to God; so 'tis lawful to desire to die, that we may be advanced to a perfect state of holiness, whenever God has no farther service to employ us in, in this world. I shall not determine what regard Job might have to these circumstances or restrictions.

I come now to make a little improvement of what has been said, and so to conclude. And,

I. If sometimes good men are greatly afflicted in this world, meet with many sorrows and troubles, as the holy scripture and experience shew that they do; this should caution us against imagining that the righteous are in a worse condition than the wicked; since this is so consistent with God's goodness and mercy, and since the righteous, generally speaking, enjoy more blessings than the wicked. Let us therefore not be prejudiced against religion; but acknowledge with the apostle, that *godliness has the promise of this life, and of that which is to come*°. And, on the other hand, we should have a care that we don't condemn the generation of the just, that we do not condemn righteous persons, because some remarkable

° 1 Tim. 4. 8.

afflictions have befallen them ; because such a man's affairs have been blasted, because such calamity has befallen any of his children, because he is become suddenly poor, or has many enemies and persecutors. Let us take heed of censuring on these occasions ; lest we become like the friends of Job, lest we speak injudiciously concerning this matter, and lest instead of comforting we should grieve the souls of them which God would not have afflicted by us ^p. And let us have a care of judging of God's *love or hatred by what we see under the sun* ^q. Let us rather judge of a man's piety, and goodness, and holiness, and purity, by his words and actions, by the manner of his conversation, than by the providential dispensations that do attend him.

2. If pious men are exposed to great afflictions in this life sometimes ; let this comfort them however, that they have a prospect of release, and that it shall not be so with them in the world to come. Here things are dispensed after such a manner, that *we can't know love or hatred by the things that are before us*. But however, happy are the righteous, because *it shall be well with them* ^r, upon all accounts in a future state.

3. This shews the folly and vanity of the wicked : who because they see some good

^p Ezek. 13. 22.

^q Eccles. 9. 1.

^r Isa. 3. 10.

men afflicted, because all manner of temporal blessings don't attend them, do presently take up with this notion, that 'tis a vain thing to be righteous; whereas they should rather form a judgment from the general conduct of God's providence, than from some such particular instance.

4. If there are various troubles and afflictions sometimes, that befall the righteous in this world; this should fortify us against them. If we are poor and indigent, if our friends deal ungratefully with us, if we lose our dearest relations, if the multitude of our bones be chastened with strong pain, if we have often clouds upon our spirits; let us not *charge God foolishly* ^f, nor complain of the conduct of his providence: it becomes us to be silent. We should say with Job, *the Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord* ^s. We are all *as clay in the hand of the potter* ^t: he will do nothing with us but what is justifiable; nay, he will *make all things work together for the good of them that love him* ^u: therefore we have great reason to be resigned to his will. Let us have a care of complaining as Jonah did, who *wished he might die*, because the sun beat upon his head ^v. We are not to repine at the providence of God, because he afflicts us, but to say with

^f Job 1. 22.

^s ver. 21.

^t Isa. 64. 8.

^u Rom. 8. 28.

^v Jonah 4. 8.

the psalmist, *in very faithfulness thou dost afflict me* ^w. He knows what is best to do with us, and for us: and he will do every thing for the good of them that fear him, as well as for the glory of his own name.

5. If death terminates the troubles and sorrows of good men; then certainly this should make us uphold ourselves with patience. It is but a little while, and we shall meet our blessed Saviour: our souls will be made happy; and our bodies will be in a state of rest till the time of the resurrection. What if our lives were to be protracted to many hundred years? would not our troubles be multiplied in proportion? but God has shortened the days of man upon earth since the beginning: and this is in mercy to the righteous. Often-times they are *taken away from the evil to come* ^x; which evil others see; and when their lives are most extended, 'tis but a little time that they have to be in this world. How sharp soever our pains and troubles are, if we are truly religious, we may comfort ourselves with this consideration, 'tis but a little time, and a period will be put to all our miseries and afflictions.

6. What a happiness is this to the righteous, that death which is so terrible to the

^w Psal. 119. 75.

| ^x Isa. 57. 1.

wicked, is become so much less formidable, nay, is become even desireable to them? The most prosperous of the wicked, what a sad change will they find, when they pass into another world? the righteous then cease from being troubled, but the wicked will be tormented for ever. *The weary* righteous will *be at rest* after all the labour and toil they have gone through, and the oppressions they have endured in this world: but the wicked, who have been *wearying themselves for every vanity*^y; these must be tormented for ever and ever. What a vast difference is there between the state of the one and the other?

7. This should comfort us concerning our pious friends and relations, when they pass out of this world. 'Tis true, we may, and ought to be sorrowful at their departure: 'tis unnatural and brutish not to be moved on such occasions. God does not require that we should be stupid: he designs we should consider the stroke of his hand, and be suitably affected with it. He teaches us by this, the vanity of the world; and puts us in mind how frail we are, that we may *number our own days, and apply our hearts to wisdom*^z. But then we are *not to sorrow as those without hope*^a, when there is occasion for us justly to conclude that our

^y Hab. 2. 13.^z Psal. 90. 12.^a 1 Thes. 4. 13.

friends are happy, who are passed into their eternal state. We mourn because we loved their company, and the advantages we received from their conversation while on earth: but if we loved them, we should surely have some comfort, and satisfaction, in the consideration of the happiness and joy into which they are entered. They are there, where there is no trouble, no sorrow, where tears are wiped from all eyes. Our hearts perhaps are deeply touched: but it should be some alleviation of our sorrow, when we consider that tho they are gone from us, they are entered into a state of perfect rest and tranquility; where they have no more complaints upon the account of the violence of bodily diseases, or distresses of the mind. There is indeed great occasion of joy, when we have reason to conclude, that they are ascended into that glory and felicity, where no pains, no diseases, no kind of affliction shall ever hinder or interrupt the service of God in which they are employ'd, nor their enjoyment of him. And then we should consider the doctrine of the resurrection. What comfort should that afford us, that those bodies which moulder into dust, shall be raised by the glorious power of the Redeemer? *Comfort one another with these words^b, says the apostle: and do not sorrow like those that have no hope^c.*

^b 1 Thes. 4. 18.

| ^c ver. 13.

And

And indeed we have occasion to be comforted, on the account of our deceased friend, who desired this text should be insisted on amongst you after his dissolution. We have occasion, I say, to be comforted on his account. As we have reason to believe he was a person of piety and religion; so some of us knew that he was desirous to be dissolved, that he might have that rest and tranquility, that repose and refreshment, which seems to be aimed at by Job, in the words of our text, *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be at rest.* He was not indeed afflicted as Job was, tho he had a considerable measure of trials in this world. He had been cruelly and maliciously persecuted, tho God was pleased to give him deliverance, for which he was very thankful throughout the remainder of his time. He had affliction enough in this world, to be weaned from it, and to be weary of it: and he had a sufficient prospect of the glory and happiness of the righteous, through the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ, joyfully to look into the other world; with well-grounded comfort to consider that he should pass into a state *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be at rest.* It was his great advantage to have the exercise of his reason, to the end of his life: and he acknowledged it as a particular favour from God, that he should have the free exercise
of

of that faculty under his last weakness ; that his mind should not be so discomposed by any pain or violent torment, with which many others are exercised in sickness ; but that still he had the opportunity of comforting himself, by reflection on the divine favour in time past, and in remembering those promises wherein God had made him to hope. Tho he seemed not to have extraordinary transports of joy, yet he maintained a sweet calmness and sedateness of mind : and if he regreted on any account, it was that he wanted the opportunity to wait upon God in his publick worship, which he constantly attended while he was capable, until the distemper under which he laboured obtained so far upon him, that he could enjoy that advantage no longer. However, I say, he had that repose and calm in his mind that was very desireable ; and seemed entirely resigned to the will of God, *to wait all the days of his appointed time, till his change should come* ^d.

And happy shall we be, if we imitate the examples of all good men, so that we may expect death after such a manner, as may not fill our souls with fear and terror, but rather with joy at last, however with quietness and repose of mind. The way to expect death without terror, is to do the work of our generation faithfully ; so to

^d Job 14. 14.

live as to have respect to a future state, and to make the business of this world subserve the interest of our souls with relation to another: so to behave ourselves under all affliction, and pain, as to be resigned to the will of God, till he shall loose our bonds, and bring us into a state of glorious liberty, satisfaction, and tranquility. 'Tis worth the while to be religious, considering the happy consequences of it in the joy of a good conscience: but how much more on the account of the great blessings that will be bestowed upon the righteous hereafter? We should therefore be comforted under all our afflictions; both in the loss of our relations and friends, and whatever other troubles do attend us: and remember them *whose conversation has been as becomes the gospel*, that we may follow *their faith*^e, that so we may enter into that joy of our Lord^f, into which they are enter'd.

^e Heb. 13. 7.| ^f Mat. 25. 21.

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